Marxism Today
May 1990 £1.50
Jeanette Winterson's secrets
The spectacular Eddie Murphy
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ISSN 0025-9118
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The Forward March Of Labour
David Marquand, Ivor Crewe, Robin Cook, Beatrix Campbell on Labour's resurgence

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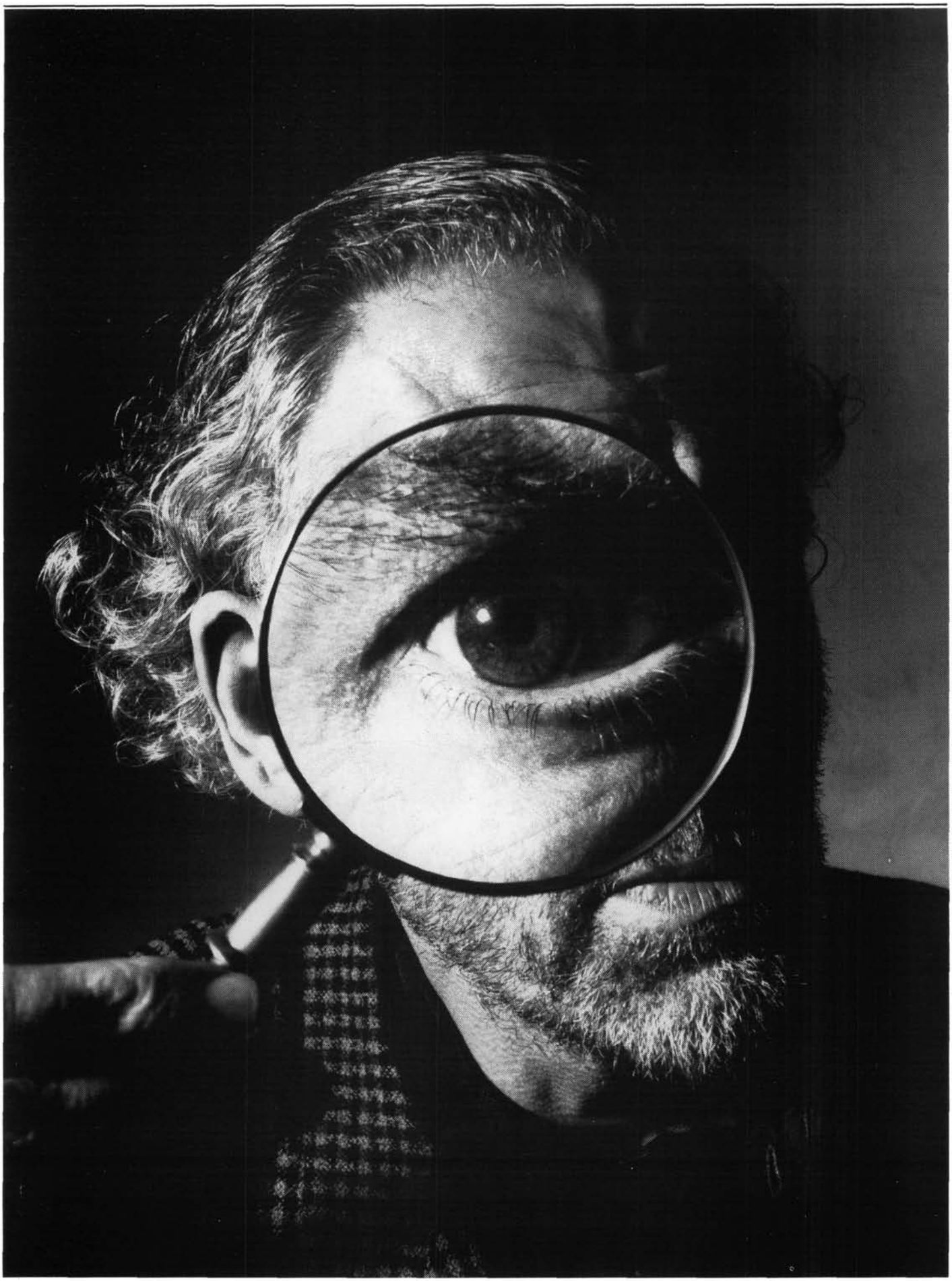
The **Critics**



Review **Guardian takes a closer look at** *The* **Arts. Every Thursday.**

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GO BEAT

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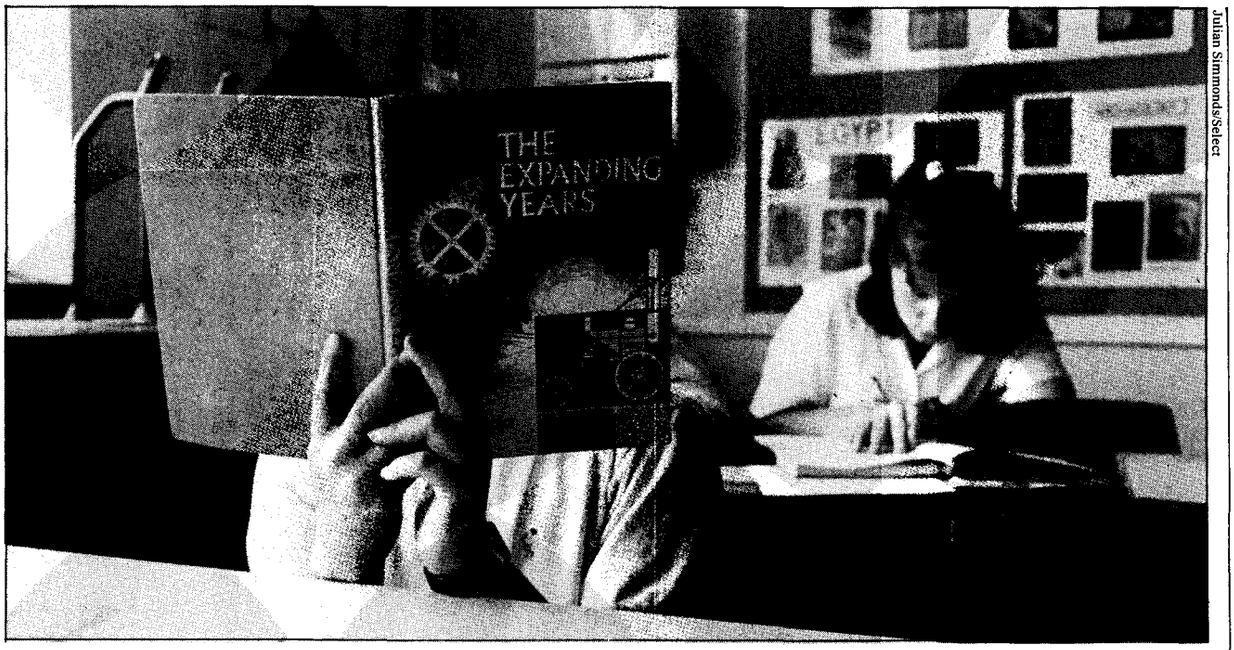
Christopher Hill exmaines new proposals for the history curriculum

Blind Dates



Julian Simmonds/Select

The report of the government-appointed History Working Group was published last month. It proposes a curriculum for schools which will make history 'challenging, relevant and interesting', 'to help to understand the present in the context of the past', 'to give pupils an understanding of their own cultural roots and shared inheritances'. Alongside five chunks of *British* (not merely English) history and four of European history including Britain, it proposes alternative subjects and optional extras covering China, India, Japan and Africa, ships and seamen through history and nearly 30 other subjects. From all this pupils should attain 'a critically sharpened intelligence with which to make sense of current affairs'. No more memorising of English kings, battles and parliaments: an exhilarating prospect.

Not unexpectedly, the politicians were continually breathing down necks, calling for more testing on facts, more English history. The group stuck determinedly to its guns. 'Names, dates and places provide only the starting-point for understanding', without which 'history is reduced to parrot learning, and assessment to a parlour memory game'. They saw dangers of 'a step down the road to an "official history"'. 'There will always be those who seek to impose a particular view of society through an interpretation of history'. (Such perhaps as Mrs Thatcher's idea that the Magna Carta barons invented the rights of man, and that 1688 had something to do with democracy.)

History must train 'future citizens of a democracy', in which 'change is inherent'. Teachers should 'offer pupils a balanced presentation of opposing views', so that they can think for themselves, and understand that there are 'no monopolies of truth'. To explain how Britain became what it is today, history must be studied from many standpoints – rich and poor, men and women, different ethnic groups and ideologies. Comparative study of other countries will put British history in perspective.

The group had to accept the goverment's mania for assessment. But it insisted – despite much pressure – that 'assessment must be the servant of teaching, not its master'. 'Historical knowledge as information must be assessed . . . in the only way that invests it with meaning: in context.' Teachers can assess pupils far better than outside tests. The government's climb-down on testing removes one obstacle to implementation of the report, at whose wisdom I have been able only to hint. An interim report was 'overwhelmingly welcomed' by readers – presumably mostly schoolteachers.

I have never taught history in a school. Conveying a sense of its excitement and relevance to unenthusiastic youngsters must be extremely difficult, calling for imagination and intensive preparation. Schoolteachers can never be paid enough. They need no patronising advice from university teachers, whose job is so different and so much softer.

A self-appointed group calling itself the History Curriculum Association has apparently secured the right to be consulted on the final report, I do not know why or how. In its name, Professor Robert Skidelsky has circulated a manifesto together with a document signed (among others) by several be-knighted and be-lorded historians. Skidelsky uses emotive language to denounce 'the new history', 'largely set in train by schoolteachers and educationalists' (how dreadful!) because of its 'hostility to British history and to knowledge'. Skidelsky dislikes assessment, but primarily because it 'prevents the testing of knowledge as such' – ie, kings, dates, etc. He is rightly concerned lest able pupils are encouraged to give up history at age 14. But his main demands are those which the government has been pressing on the working group – more facts and more British history. No doubt this is a coincidence, but it is an ominous coincidence.

This exciting report's strength is its basis in practical schoolteaching experience. But its proposals will require new textbooks and materials and the training of new teachers. Plenty of grounds here for shelving or emasculating the report. Teachers (school and university) may have to fight for the implementation in its entirety of this imaginative and far-sighted report. ●

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EYE TO EYE

Beatrix Campbell explores Labour's new-found confidence

Recipe For Success

Robin Cook is Labour's shadow secretary of state for health

What explains Labour's extraordinary triumph at the Mid-Staffordshire by-election, and the enduring success in the opinion polls?
I've always been very suspicious of single-cause explanations. There's no doubt that what crystallised the present mood of southern and middle England is the impact of the poll tax. That doesn't surprise me as a Scot. The poll tax is actually a wonderful symbol of the Conservatives' style of government: it is socially unjust, regressive between the classes, it poses a major threat to democratic rights and civil liberties. It is the product of a government that takes pride in demonstrating its strength by defying public opinion. It is also deliberately designed to be an unpopular tax, in the hope it would make local government unpopular.

So it is not simply a reaction to the poll tax, but also to the style of government.

So Labour is doing well because people hate Thatcherism?
I began by saying I don't accept simple solutions. A lot of things are happening. Labour has been undergoing substantial change.

What's changed?
There is a perception of Labour as having a competent new front-bench. That's been the case for three years, but it's only in the last six months that people have started to perceive it. Labour has also sought to position itself as a welcoming and attractive party which people could support without being offended, as it were.

I also think the message that we are prepared to listen and to engage in dialogue, both with local communities and professional people, has contrasted flatly with the style of this government.

How effective is Labour's metamorphosis?
Dramatic. A number of us associated with the Labour Co-ordinating Committee were saying back in 1982 that the internal battle is all very exciting for those taking part, but the important thing is to engage in a dialogue with the electorate. Eight years on the party is hungry for power and will now ruthlessly push aside anybody who puts their own personal or factional priorities ahead of the party winning. That has been a tremendous change – possibly too far... .

So the party has been disciplined.
No. Discipline implies central imposition of control.

Hasn't that happened?
There's been an element of it, of course. But what has happened is a grassroots change in which people do not want to work for the Labour Party in order to make a gesture; they want to get Margaret Thatcher out of office, and they want progressive government. The central discipline could not have happened had it not been for that change.

Something that has characterised the commentary on Labour's Mid-Staffs success and recent opinion polls, is the word 'positive'. What is that positive support *for*?
To be honest, it is support, more than anything else, for change. But it reflects a negative view of the present administration. The exit polls from Mid-Staffs showed the poll tax and the national health service as the big issues.

There is also growing feeling for a positive statement for local democracy. And very strong unease about how far our society is palpably less equal, less just.

What makes today different from the early 80s, when people were appalled by unemployment, and yet it didn't ignite the resistance and rage that we see now?
I think you and I have got to be very careful, Bea, that just because we have been aware of these injustices all that time, we don't mock the Johnny-come-latelys who have suddenly discovered them and become concerned.

I'm not mocking them. One factor, presumably, is what people felt about Labour?
If there has been change, we are talking about public perception. The change in that perception may have occurred in the early 80s, when the party appeared to be convulsed with its own internal agenda rather than the priorities of the electorate.

What have you learned from that process? In what way have you been changed by it?
If I have been able to make a contribution to the party over the last two or three years, it is because I have been able to take the debate about the health service into the tabloids and television. We're taking an interest in the broadcasting media that we didn't before.

In 1980 or '81, I would have to put my hand on my heart and say that my priority was getting an article on the Agenda page of *The Guardian*. You can fill up your whole diary with evening meetings with people who share your passion and political commitment. But that is not mass politics. If you go into mass politics it is a matter of communicating your message and trying to shape public opinion.

Right. So you communicate on a mass scale. But what's that got to do with mass politics? What does mass politics mean?
Mass politics is the mass franchise, isn't it? For which progressive and left people have fought from 1832 right through to 1918. An extraordinary breakthrough for working people who were able to use the strength of their vote to counter their economic weakness. We possibly forgot the importance of that power.

We see people take action over the poll tax, *doing* something. How would you integrate expressions of resistance with the electoral imperative?
Can we try and escape the use of this phrase, 'expressions of resistance', which has, firstly, a purely negative ring to it. But secondly, it also has the problem that it concedes the legitimacy of the Right and the centre taking action and then the necessity of the rest of us to resist it.

What has actually been very interesting over the last two years is the way in which people's immense frustration at finding ways of resisting the poll tax has brought home to them the sheer lack of democratic rights to give expression to mass resistance.

What does a political party *do* to organise what people feel and what they can do about this tremendously unpopular tax?
It makes visible that popular disagreement so that neither the government nor the media are in any doubt about it. Secondly, you carry that argument to parliament. Thirdly, you encourage people at every possible opportunity when they have a ballot to cast their vote accordingly.

Now, the democratic theory is that any government confronted with that visible evidence changes its mind. But we are playing with a prime minister who does not play by those rules. Anybody else – Heath, Macmillan, Wilson, Callaghan – would have backed down.

In a sense, that's the final irony. Just at the very time when the nation is in a state of new rebellion, the Conservatives have discovered they have no way of democratically getting rid of their prime minister.

What the Tories are trying to do now is to target acts of civil disobedience, people taking to the streets on marches...
There's no civil disobedience in marching down Whitehall to have a big demonstration in Trafalgar Square.

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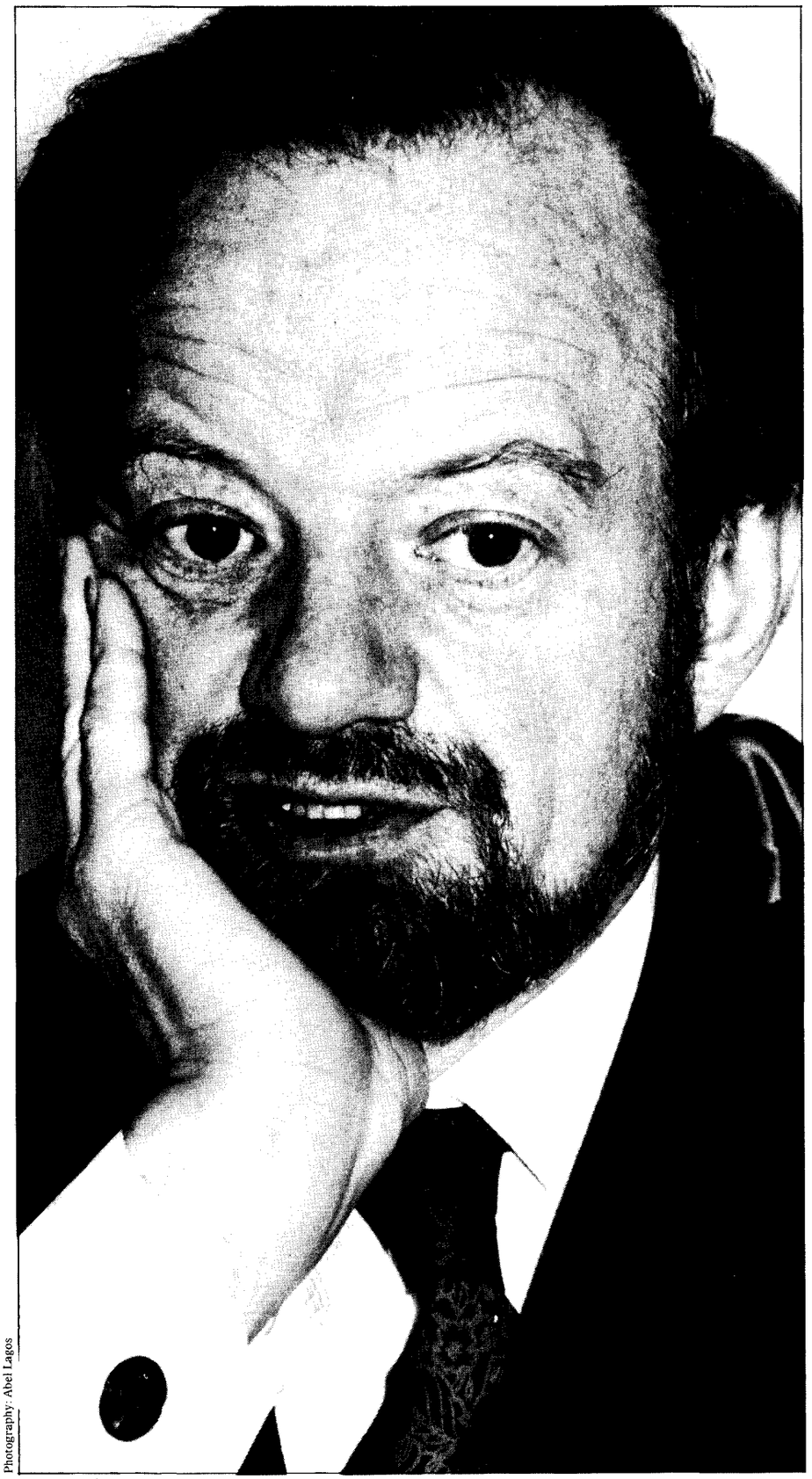

Photography: Abel Lagos

Let's be very careful what we're saying. People still have a legal right to demonstrate. I don't think we should assist the Conservatives by suggesting that the 200,000 people who turned out the other Saturday were participating in an act of civil disobedience; they weren't. They were perfectly legitimately, and overwhelmingly peaceably, demonstrating their opposition to the poll tax.

That gets converted somehow, doesn't it, into something else?
You just converted it yourself. You described it as civil disobedience.

Wait a minute, I'm trying to suggest that if people want to sit down in the road, if they dont want to – or can't – pay the tax, that gets *represented* as civil disobedience. The language suggests these acts have been criminalised.
Well, I don't describe not paying the tax as civil disobedience. I'm bound to say that the reason why the language stands up is because some on the other side play the same language.

I thought it was wonderful that so many people were prepared to turn up to that demonstration and peaceably register their presence. It is tragic that some people turned up patently to disrupt and discredit it. The objective of registering a protest against the poll tax was lost.

The Labour Party presents itself more successfully now than for 10 years. It wants to be the government, but it's not, and a government is not the same as a mass party that has to animate and express all sorts of differential wishes.
I've walked along streets as often as you have, and so have most members of the shadow cabinet. If you look back over the history of the party, we have organised marches as big as anybody else's. What is encouraging is that local Labour Parties have broken out of a fairly sterile and barren culture, they are now looking for different ways to connect with ordinary people.

Now, that is the interaction of a party which has a very clear objective to get in government, and an anxiety also to make itself accessible to local people in a way that possibly we didn't, six or seven years ago. All the changes that have happened are moving in the direction you're talking about, rather than there being any barrier between the Labour Party as a purely electoralist organisation, and people who've taken to the streets, if by taking to the streets you mean participating in demonstrations. We do it more often than any other organisation in the land.●

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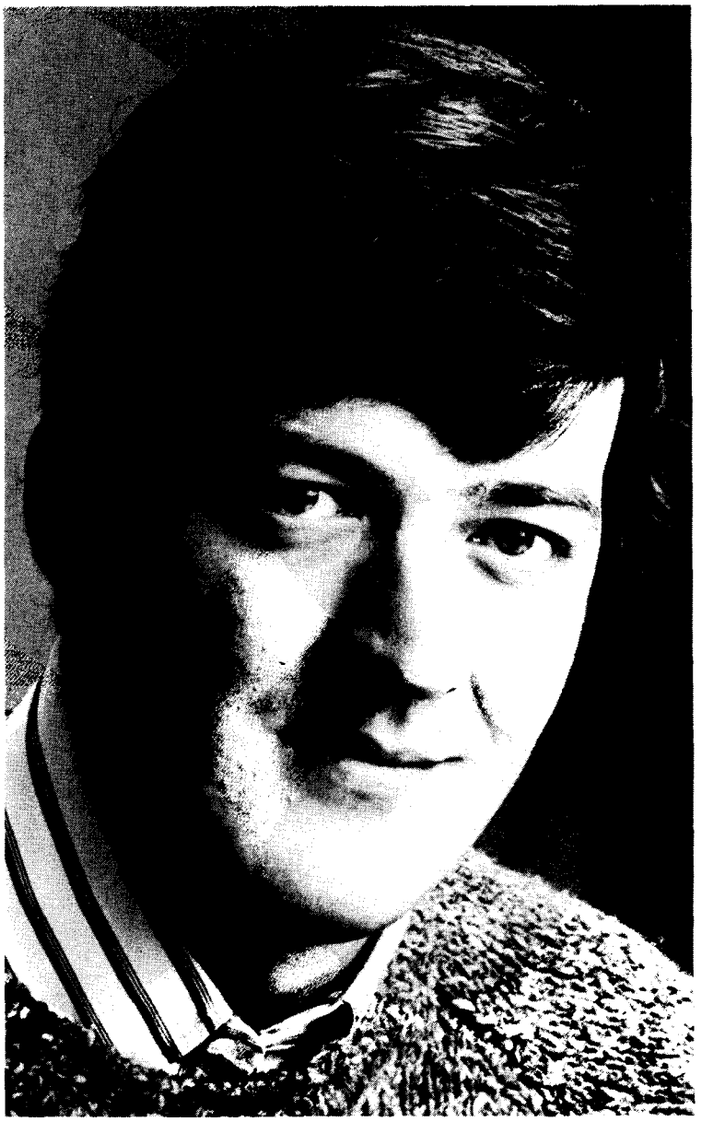

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Stephen Fry, writing in *The Sun*, following a serious asthma attack.

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Martin Kettle explores a threat to the British psyche

Tunnel Vision

As you read this, tunnellers from France and tunnellers from England are just over four miles apart under the English Channel and closing on each other all the time. By the end of the year, they will have met. And by 1993, when the tunnel opens, we will all be able to travel from Britain to the European continent directly on dry land for the first time since the Ice Age.

By any standards, the Channel Tunnel is an extraordinary development for Britain. It is a giant engineering project of course, with all the challenges which that entails. It is an agenda-changing addition to the infrastructure of Britain, challenging every assumption we make about transport and distribution. And, no less important, it will alter all of our mental infrastructure too.

Yet somehow the longer they go on digging it, the less the British seem to be convinced about the project. There is something very eloquently emblematic about the fact that as the two groups of tunnellers near one another, the French are four months ahead of their schedule, while we British are five months behind ours. Were there ever more reluctant grubbers?

It is impossible as well to ignore the half-hearted way that British capital has involved itself in the project. *Not* involved itself would actually be more accurate.

Originally, remember, the Channel Tunnel was to be Mrs Thatcher's way of providing a great showcase for the private sector's commitment to investment, to big ideas and to long-termism. British enterprise would match French subsidies step for step.

But it has turned out almost the opposite, with the Bank of England battling to persuade reluctant investors to lock money up in the project, and with one financial and management crisis after another.

And just as the French are increasingly doing the digging of the tunnel, so they are increasingly its owners. Only 22% of the Anglo-French shares are now owned on this side of the water.

Though the banks are reluctant, so far they have always been prepared in the last resort to cough up. The possibility now is that the clash of interests between the constructors – who want costs and therefore profits to rise – and the tunnel company – which wants to keep costs down to enable the Eurotunnel consortium to stay solvent and recoup its outlay as quickly as possible – will leave the project in the worst of both financial worlds. Money will go into it, but it may be that nothing emerges. It will be the exact equivalent of the tunnelling machines themselves, which are too big to remove from the tunnel and which will eventually be buried in the walls they are carving.

As with the tunnel, so also with its links. On the French side, the TGV trains stand ready and waiting, the line all-but-constructed to carry trains from Paris and Brussels. Lille, which battled to ensure that the TGV went right through the heart of the city, has become one of the most economically dynamic and regenerated areas of Europe.

On the British side, the contrast is stark, and not without a certain national pride either. There is no line connecting the tunnel to London, let alone the north and Scotland. There is no agreement about what kind of track or trains might be built – if any. In south-east London and Kent, communities rise up to keep the rail link out of their backyards.

Of course, plenty of public money is spent on the project, but here again Britain is falling between two stools. It is not enough to match the French commitment to the project; but too much to allow market forces to decide whether there really is a demand for the tunnel.

Unsurprisingly, therefore, the political vultures have been hovering overhead for several months now. The new Right never liked the tunnel much. Now they are well into their second chorus of *We Told You So*. Alfred Sherman recently suggested that the whole thing should simply be left to the French, since the project is in their interests rather than ours. And Bernard Levin wrote that the tunnel is doomed to be a multi-billion pound white elephant which might just go into profit in the last decade of the 21st century.

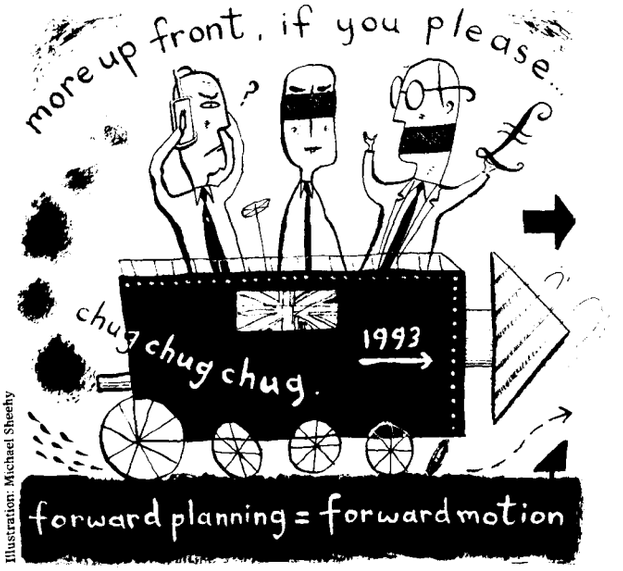
Mrs Thatcher's government has not given way to such seditious talk yet. But the modern Conservative Party is hopelessly caught between the options. Cecil Parkinson, the transport secretary, though far from unique, is the most glaring example of their ambiguous attitude. With one hand he is busy planning for a future with the tunnel, while with the other he is scrapping any aspect of it which might put southern Tory marginals at risk.

Ironically, the Labour Party's enthusiasm for the tunnel now also seems to contribute to the uncertainties. Its transport spokesperson, John Prescott, has said that a Labour government would scrap the tunnel link route which the Conservatives officially support into south London. Instead, Labour wants a north-Kent freight and passenger route linking into the wider BR network. That is an entirely sensible policy, but the fact that a Labour government is now regarded as a serious possibility means the Tories' plans are themselves red-lined.

'There is something very emblematic about the fact that the French tunnellers are four months ahead of their schedule, while we are five months behind ours.'

So it is all too evident how the Channel Tunnel has become a metaphor for the British relationship with Europe. And what a dismal one it is. We were late starting – a couple of decades late, at least. We still have no vision of how the project might help to transform our lives, but rather, we are preoccupied with its impact on the environment, on house prices and on the C2 vote in the southeast.

Thatcherism was always obsessed with making ideological gestures over public spending. Now it is entirely reduced to them. Yet it is also preoccupied with parochialism which looms all the larger in the light of Labour's opinion-poll lead. That combination now threatens the very life of the Anglo-French link. If the tunnel were to shut down in mid-Channel, it would be a fitting epitaph to an approach which could not match its grandiose aims in its hopelessly indecisive implementation.●



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PREVIEW

Andrea Stuart on Hollywood's streetwise screen success

Murphy's Lore

In *Harlem Nights*, Eddie Murphy plays alongside his idol Richard Pryor

'Eeeh-eeh-eeh-eeeh.' For a man whose laugh is arguably the most famous in Hollywood, Eddie Murphy doesn't laugh very much. But if Eddie saves his smiles for the camera, his films usually have his studio, Paramount, laughing all the way to the bank.

It has yet to be seen, however, whether *Harlem Nights*, his latest offering, will be blessed with the Midas touch that has made his name a veritable mantra for American movie executives. So far things haven't been going well; the picture has been panned in the US, and in this country the film's distributor, UIP, is determinedly downplaying its launch in late May. And – perhaps this is an omen – Murphy has just lost a multi-million dollar lawsuit in the US for plagiarism over the storyline of an earlier film.

Harlem Nights marks Eddie's directorial debut, starring his idol Richard Pryor and his best friend and co-star from *Coming To America*, Arsenio Hall. On paper, it should be the proverbial sure-fire hit. But it seems that American audiences have had difficulty adjusting to a character somewhat removed from the well-loved persona Eddie has established in past films. In *Harlem Nights*, he plays for the first time a kind of 'baddie' instead of the more familiar cheeky, irreverent but lovable bad-boy of *Beverly Hills Cop* (*I* and *II*).

Eddie Murphy's screen persona, like Chaplin's tramp, is the quintessential outsider/underdog. And indeed, each of his films' most memorable moments play on the central metaphor of a man who just shouldn't be wherever the hell he is (a bit like being a black man in white America, maybe). In *Trading Places* he is the poor black street-hustler who changes places with a rich white yuppie; while in his most electrifying scene in *48 Hours* he pretends to be a black cop in a racist white bar ('I'm your worst nightmare – a nigger with a badge!').

Murphy's screen image plays on a universal and irresistible transformation fantasy updated with a funky soundtrack and some of the bluest language in film. It is a fantasy with particular resonance in the context of the American dream – that of the irrepressible 'little man', albeit a black one, who through sheer *chutzpah* and guile beats the system and in the meantime teaches those tight-asses in authority a thing or two about humanity and 'real' values.

If *Harlem Nights* dies at the box-office, it will be virtually the first of Mr Murphy's projects to do so. From the moment he stole the show from veteran Hollywood leading man, Nick Nolte, in his first film *48 Hours*, Murphy has been the undisputed King of Comedy. His films have grossed more than a billion dollars and *Beverly Hills Cop*, the movie that launched his career into the stratosphere alongside Sly Stallone and Clint Eastwood, is the highest-earning comedy of all time.

With Eddie Murphy, otherwise known as 'Eddie Money', 'Big Money' or just plain 'Money' to his friends, it hasn't been just a case of everything he touches turning to gold; more a case of turning to platinum (including his single *Party All The Time*, which got to No 2 in the American charts). Even his turkeys, like *Golden Child* – 'a piece of shit' is how Murphy described it – can't help making mullah, in that instance $100m-worth.

This unprecedented cross-over appeal has meant inevitably that his films have been heavily scrutinised. Black critics and right-on white folk have often responded to his efforts with undisguised hostility. Apart from blanket criticisms about his misogyny and 'gay-bashing', they have accused him of pandering to Hollywood stereotypes; 'Making the sorts of films about black people that Hollywood loves to sell,' the director Euzhan Palcy says.

Others have been even less restrained. The Afro-American journalist Armond White described Murphy's film *Coming To America* as a 'betrayal of every instance of politics, history, sex and ethnic culture that black people have ever known'.

Heavy shit. On the accusations of his homophobia and sexism Murphy is relatively sanguine. It is clear that he doesn't have a lot of faith in women ('My first reaction is

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to be distrustful – especially of women') and he has declared that of the rumours spread about him (which include accusations of womanising, sexual harassment and drug abuse), those he finds personally most offensive are the insinuations that he might be gay.

But when it comes to betraying 'his people' Murphy loses his cool. He points out, rightly, how popular his films are with black audiences and that his studio is the most racially integrated of all the Hollywood film factories.

'It is this talent in "the art of the deal" that underlies Murphy's appeal. This boy knows how to play the game. And he wins in life just like he wins in the movies.'

He admirably restrains himself from mentioning (as others are fond of doing) that without his commercial success it is unlikely that fellow members of the 'black-pack', including film-makers Spike Lee, Robert *Hollywood Shuffle* Townsend and Keenen Ivory Wayans, would have had a chance.

But it is money, the filthy lucre, that provides the key to understanding the Murphy phenomenon. He has said of his profession that 'we are all whores', but if this is the case, then Eddie is the whore with the highest price. Having renegotiated his initial deal with Paramount into a hugely lucrative package, 'Big Money' Murphy is well on his way to becoming a multinational.

What Murphy has been able to do, up till now, is to merge the luck of being the right man – the right black man – in the right place at the right time, with an uncanny instinct for a money-making formula: he knows how to run a business.

And it is this talent in 'the art of the deal' that underlies Murphy's appeal – at least for many black people. This boy knows how to play the game. And he wins in life just like he wins in the movies. Most whites cannot imagine how demoralising it is for black people to hear yet another tale of the mega-talented, politically-cred, black comic/musician/actor who ends up drunk, lonely and impoverished in some tenament walk-up because he got shafted yet again by the money-men. 'One of my major fears,' Murphy told *Rolling Stone* magazine, 'has always been that I'd get that call: "Your accountant's gone with all your money!" That kind of shit is spooky. So I know where every dime of my money is and nobody can sign checks for me.'

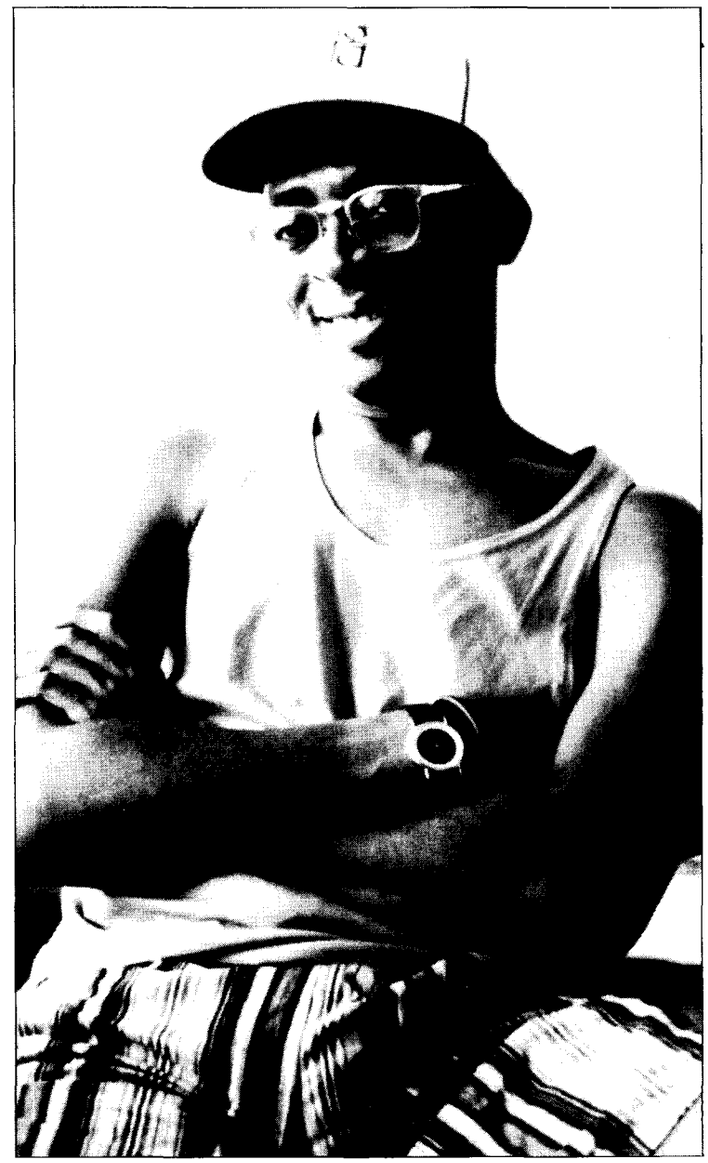
In this sense Eddie represents the new wave of black entertainers like Bill Cosby, Oprah Winfrey or Michael Jackson whose names dominate the Forbes 100 Best-Paid Entertainers List (Michael Jackson topped the charts as the highest-paid entertainer, of any colour, in any part of the world). Having learned from the bitter experiences of their predecessors that talent isn't nearly enough, they also recognise that Hollywood is colour-blind only if the colour in question is green; the colour of money.

But Murphy's success represents more than just a new mood among black entertainers. His career also reflects changes within the black community itself. Despite his wise-ass, street-smart characters, Murphy is no Richard Pryor. He wasn't born into a dead-end family with a prostitute mother and an absent father. Though he has had his troubles – a period of poverty after his father, a policeman, was murdered by one of his mistresses (hell hath no fury...) – Eddie Murphy, brought up in far-from-urban Long Island, is a product of the emerging black middle class.

This background permeates his comedy. It isn't the angst-ridden urban cry of a ghetto child like Pryor. It isn't even the edgy, politically-conscious satire we associate with the even more middle-class Spike Lee. No, Eddie's comedy is mainstream because in many ways his experience is mainstream. It crosses over because at 29 Murphy is one of the first children of the black tv generation whose style and aspirations are culled from a racially amorphous, if clichéd, source; he is a black suburban boy who spent his solitary childhood in front of the tv dreaming about being Elvis.

And he has been brought up in an American society where, for better or worse, black lives, courtesy of *The Cosby Show* and any number of other American sit-coms (those black lives that don't fall into the bottomless void of America's ever-expanding underclass, that is), are more accessible now than they have ever been.

As a child nurtured on tv's cross-over dreams, Eddie Murphy's lifelong ambition to be Mr Entertainment, a latter-day Sammy Davis Jr, must have seemed simple – even a little hackneyed. But as a grown-up these dreams increasingly represent a dilemma, one that keeps all his mega black-pack buddies awake at nights, one for which there are no easy answers: how does one, as a black artist, achieve the autonomy and economic clout that only the mainstream can offer, without compromising your community?●



Spike Lee: Typical of the new class of Hollywood black-pack

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Body Blows

From Celia Brackenridge, principal lecturer in leisure management at Sheffield City Polytechnic

Matt Seaton's article, 'Work Your Body' (*MT* April) is welcome as a rare attempt to put physical culture on to the Left's agenda. However, in exploring this high-profile phenomenon, Seaton conflates health, sport and fitness in a way which confuses their very different qualities and meanings.

The eating disorders, hormonal conditions and drugs-related side-effects associated with exercise obsession can hardly be described as empowering. Indeed, many of those most intensely involved in sport would probably argue that it should carry a health warning!

Seaton also falls into the trap of perpetuating the Cartesian myth of 'psycho-physical dualism' (that the mind and body are separate entities), thus denying the holism of the self which one might expect from a left critique. In his enthusiasm for participation, Seaton seems uncritically to be justifying rather than understanding the current fitness boom.

Of greatest concern is his apparent ignorance of the way in which gender mediates both access to, and experience of, exercise regimes. For example, he optimistically asserts that the new physical culture 'is "consumer-led", determined by people as agents, not passive victims, of marketing campaigns' and that 'the gains are particularly significant for women'.

This view ignores the continued and indeed emphasised, marginalisation of women (especially black women, older women, disabled women, women in poverty, young mothers...) within the so-called fitness revolution.

Annual Sports Council data do chart a decade of increasing participation by both men and women, and the statistics for women's increased engagement in indoor activities owe much to the popularity of what might loosely be called exercise-to-music classes. But does this support Seaton's case? I would argue that, far from this representing a rejection of the feminine stereotype, it actually confirms patriarchal definitions of the female body.

Even for those women who *do* now exercise regularly in designer wear, the body cult has done little to help challenge prevailing ideologies of womanhood (especially motherhood) and has actually reinforced 1980s-style heterosexual stereotypes of femininity.

Sure, radical feminists have consistently addressed the issue of women's control over reproduction and have challenged size and shape norms (fat is still a feminist issue), but Seaton is naive in his assumption that the new physical culture has given 'a huge practical boost' to feminist ideas – far from it.

While personal physical strength can promote women's self-confidence (indeed, that has been the express purpose of some of the more enlightened self-defence/assertiveness courses), individual confidence needs to be converted into collective political consciousness and action for changes in women's status to be achieved. The objectification of the body which occurs in most 'marketed' exercise classes serves merely to inhibit women's potential to subvert the patriarchal system.

Moreover, women who fall short of the standards of the exercise culture (with its slender, toned bodies, fashion-wear, smooth-tanned skins and overt displays of female apologetics in the changing room) face ostracism and ridicule from their female peers.

Muscle definition may be more acceptable in the early 90s than it was in the 60s or early 70s but for most women, at least, it is pursued within a clear heterosexual framework. While ambiguously gay male imagery fills the exercise ads, women are still portrayed as passive, heterosexual adornments. Flo Jo provides not, as Seaton suggests, a 'more accurate role model' for women seeking self-definition, but a hopelessly unrealistic one, which colludes outlandishly with that form of hegemonic heterosexual masculinity which is most oppressive to women *and* a great many men.●

Family Fortunes

From Gill Butler, of the campaign for access to donor insemination.

Wendy Savage's article about the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Bill (*MT* April) rightly predicted that the anti-abortionist lobby would use the bill to attack abortion rights. Why however, was no mention made of the fact that the bill also seeks to control the provision by clinics of donor insemination (DI)?

When the bill was in the Lords, an amendment making it a criminal offence for clinics to provide DI to unmarried women was defeated by only one vote. A similar amendment is certain to be introduced in the Commons.

Supporters of restricted access have discovered that some single women and, horror upon horror, some lesbians, are choosing to become pregnant by DI. They believe that children so conceived are 'at grave risk of subsequent emotional harm'. That there is absolutely no evidence to support this view does not deter them in the slightest.

All legislation concerning children should have the child's welfare as its paramount concern. Restricting DI to married women is in effect saying that unmarried families or single-parent families are second best. In particular, it is also saying that lesbians are not fit to parent.

Yet one in three marriages today end in divorce. A survey in 1987 showed that some 900,000 couples were cohabiting outside of marriage, and recent legislation has gone a considerable way towards reducing the legal distinction between children born within married families and those born to unmarried families.

Yet the moral Right cling to the idea that the nuclear family is, and should be, the norm.

Law based on discrimination is not only bad law, it is dangerous law. Such a law would legitimise the prejudice that already exists about lesbians and single women as parents. It would also stigmatise the thousands of children already born by DI to lesbians and single women.

Restricting access to DI is as much an attack on a woman's right to choose as restricting access to abortion. That being so, I am disappointed that there are some in the pro-choice movement who seem to forget or overlook this. It couldn't possibly have anything to do with wanting to avoid the politically 'embarrassing' issue of lesbian motherhood – or could it?●

Just Not Cricket

Matt Seaton is right up to a point when he says that women have gained from the new surge of sports activity: a few years ago it would have been unthinkable for women to run 10,000 metres. Now, even women in their 70s and 80s take part in the London marathon.

But when are sport sponsors, the media, and many sports*men* going to recognise women in sport on the same level as men? Even in tennis, where women have perhaps made most progress, the principle of equal pay for work of equal value has yet to be established.

As for other sports, women footballers, cricketers, snooker players are good for a laugh or a patronising once-a-year showing on tv. And women sailors competing with men in the Round The World yacht race? You must be joking – whoops, they won a stage? Good show, girls. (Note to David Coleman, Desmond Lynam and all other male sports commentators: females in their 20s and 30s are women, not girls. OK?)●

Margaret Woddis, London

Narrow Outlook

R Evans' historical analysis of German nationalism (*MT* April) is not only conventional, but also inappropriate in relation to what is happening across central Europe.

It is misleading and even dangerous to talk about Germany only in terms of its nationalistic potential and apparent economic superiority. Ordering the discourse around these themes and deploying us/them, inside/outside metaphors, reaffirms prejudices and mythical patterns of identification and weakens those opposed to nationalistic forces.

And it is also a matter of agenda-setting. Habermas has argued for giving the discourse around German unification a distinctly European dimension, to shift the emphasis away from 'the diffuse notion of the nation-state'. We need such analyses that address current processes on an inter-national level.

Between the abstract global and the intimate local field, on which new times analysis appears strong, there is a vast intermediate field of, for instance, European interaction. This has to be recognised as a site of actual political and cultural struggle, demanding urgent intervention.●

Andreas Broeckmann, Norwich

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Poll-Tax Pitfalls

Your two features (*MT* April) discuss the Tory poll-tax predicament but do not deal either with Labour's alternative or their response.

The only realistic strategy Labour can offer is to commit itself to repeal of the poll tax.

Any serious advocate of a Labour-led non-payment campaign would have to take on board other issues. For instance, could a Labour council simultaneously agree a budget – and hence set a poll-tax rate – and then ask constituents not to pay it?

Moreover, would the Labour Party, nationally and locally, be expected to provide help and representation for individuals facing legal action following their failure to pay?

It is one thing for the Anti-Poll Tax Federation to urge people to break the law, and quite another for a party which must project itself as a responsible party of government.

And non-payment does set an awkward precedent. How would we have felt about a nationwide campaign of non-payment by ratepayers against profligate socialist councils 'wasting money on gays and lesbians'?

Labour's tasks are twofold. At national level the party must investigate what alternative to the community charge would satisfy the criteria of good taxation and be fairer than the old rating system. At local level Labour authorities must provide services to the community by setting the best budgets they can, under a multitude of constraints; and protect the weakest and most disadvantaged by ensuring that all rebates are claimed.

This is not a 'retreat into the safety of the opinion polls' but hard politics, involving difficult decisions and compromises. If we are serious about exercising power in the localities then such tasks are more important than mock-heroics or pious generalities.●

Gerry Leversha, Acton

Private Limits

In his article on the ramifications of the poll tax Andrew Gamble notes that the programme for local privatisation has not moved far enough or fast enough to allow the government to implement the tax successfully.

Gamble asserts that this is largely due to the traditional 'one-nation' ethos of local Tory politicians. True, there are surprisingly few admirers of Westminster, Wandsworth and Bradford among the Conservatives' local-government cadre. But other considerations have also severely limited the political space available both for free-market liberals and penny-pinchers.

The political limits of local privatisation are clearly demonstrated by the increasing success of local campaigns in halting sell-offs, primarily in housing and social services.

Many Labour authorities in inner-urban areas have long appreciated that elected authority is not the same as local power. They have had to deal with a vocal and confident voluntary sector and often a well-organised tenants' movement. The same is perhaps true in Westminster, where the Tories' housing policy is in deep trouble.

Yet housing privatisation plans have also been defeated in Redbridge (where a tenants' movement armed with a £100 grant defeated a £500,000 campaign from the council) in Torquay, Elmbridge, Havering and Hertsmere. In Wirral the ruling Tory/Liberal coalition has been forced to reconsider its plans to sell off its homes for pensioners: a clear example of 'grey power' in action.

This is not to say that there have not been many successful privatisations – there have. Nor is it to claim that local-authority provision is an unalloyed success. But even if only in a purely defensive way, local government is still proving a painful thorn in the side of even the most arrogant of Tory politicians.●

Adrian McMenamin, Herts

Secular Chauvinism

The article 'Refusing Holy Orders' (*MT* March), contains so many half-truths and vague generalisations that it is difficult to treat seriously.

It seems from the two authors' writing that every brand of religious 'fundamentalism' is dangerous except their own, which they do not even care to mention.

Their brand of liberal secular fundamentalism thinks that the greatest right a woman can acquire is the right to abort live foetuses, as if this is what women all along have been struggling for.

They totally denude the human being of his most important aspect, the soul, and its need of regular nourishment and nurture, which is only possible through following a spiritual path. This is a vital component of all major theistic religions but absent altogether from all atheistic religions, of which they are active proponents.

Do they really think that women are turning towards religious 'fundamentalism' as a refuge from the racism and sexism of the host society, only to end up 'under the strict control of the male leaderships. . .'? Are these women so stupid as to exchange the frying pan for the fire? Surely as women writers they ought to credit their own gender with more intelligence.

As for seeking to harness the powers of the modern state and media to the service of religious ideology, I cannot understand what all the fuss is about. Or are the authors afraid that if theists were to gain control of these sources, they might become more popular than the fundamentalists of the liberal and secular Left?●

Jameela Hassan, London

Cartoon: Nick Newman

Two Plus Two

If Cardinal O'Connor is a murderer, Rex Wockner's piece (*MT* Mar) does not prove the case.

The Catholic Church is against both homosexual practice and condoms, but someone who breaks the first rule is hardly likely to keep the second one; if he does and then gets Aids, he must be slightly unhinged to then point the finger at the church hierarchy.

The Aids epidemic is bound to produce hysteria and Wockner seems to be describing a good example. I am not surprised mainstream gay groups wanted to keep their distance.●

Ron Collins, Axminster

Pack Up Your Troubles

Charlotte Du Cann's article on 'Escape Routes' (*MT* April) was a surprise. I thought it was just me (and a few more) who were taking advantage of the demise of Ilea to get our hands on some redundancy dosh and start a career of serious bumming, but obviously it has become a social trend. I thought I had detected envious glints in people's eyes every time I mentioned packing in my job!

Even the mortgage is no longer an excuse to stay put. One couple, friends of mine, are selling up their house and going travelling; another friend is exchanging his multi-burgled flat in Hackney for a camper van.

And where are we all going? Not to some exotic location – we are going to explore good old Europe!

Now there's *Zeitgeist* for you!●

Ilse Zambonini, London

It's Natural

In your article, 'Mother Nature' (*MT* Mar) Jean Grimshaw asks, 'What kind of "bond" is this?', ie, between mother and child. The 'bond' is love and for most women, in most circumstances, it *is* eternal.

What a lot of squeamishness over a four-letter word.●

Deborah Whitaker, Tring

Editorial Note:

We welcome your letters to add to discussion. Please send them to *MT* Letters, 16 St John Street, London EC1M 4AY. Brevity means you are more likely to be published. We reserve the right to cut.●

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Labour's Forward March

The Silent Road To Power

As Thatcherism flounders and Labour rides high in the polls, **David Marquand** turns his thoughts to the prospect of a Labour government

Like the wave of revolutions which swept through Eastern Europe last year, the unravelling of the Thatcherite hegemony of the early and middle 1980s has happened so quickly that it is hard to keep pace with it, and harder still to understand it. We know that Mrs Thatcher is now the most unpopular prime minister since opinion polling began and that Labour's current poll lead would give it a House of Commons majority of 1945 proportions. We do not know why. It seems fairly clear that mid-term protest provides only part of the explanation. As in Eastern Europe last year, the regime has lost confidence in itself; it has lost authority because it no longer knows where it wants to go or how to get there. Public discontent reflects ministerial confusion; ministerial confusion feeds on public discontent. Beyond that, one can only speculate.

Understandably, perhaps, Labour has reacted with a demure negativism reminiscent of the three wise monkeys. Having in the past inflicted immeasurable damage on itself by foolish and ill-considered policy statements, it has now adopted a posture of enigmatic smiles and sealed lips. To judge by its conduct over the last few months, its chief aim is to give no hostages to fortune, to present as narrow a flank as possible to Conservative counter-attack, to do and say nothing which might upset any group of voters anywhere in sight. And so it stands, palms eagerly outstretched, waiting for power to fall into its grasp.

In narrowly electoral terms, this posture has much to commend it. Labour faces a viciously hostile press which is certain to misrepresent anything it says. Though the public mood is obviously changing, nobody can tell how far or how deep the change has gone. False moves on the part of Kinnock or his lieutenants could easily put the gains they have made over the past few months in peril. The policy review has given the party a reassuringly moderate image which seems to be playing well with the voters. Given that governments lose elections more often than oppositions win them, why risk upsetting a volatile electorate by explaining how the image connects with reality?

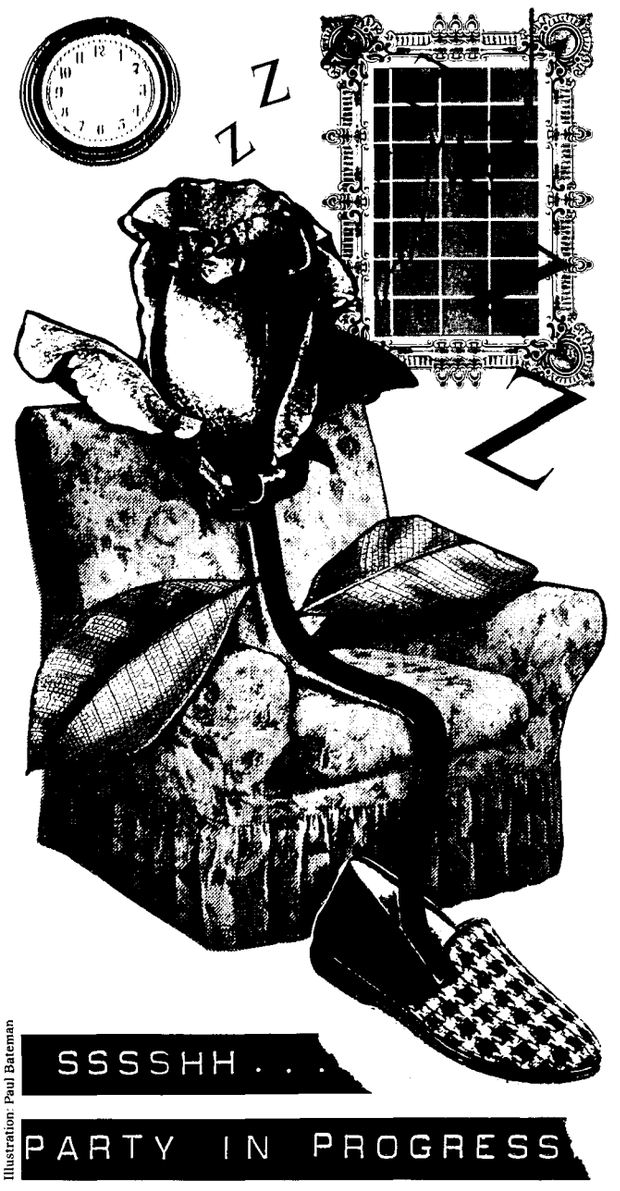

Illustration: Paul Bateman

Yet even in narrowly electoral terms, there are dangers in this approach. The better Labour does, the more it will look like an alternative government; the more it looks like an alternative government, the more people will want to know what it intends to do with power when it wins it. Demure negativism may satisfy the punters now, but it is unlikely to keep them satisfied through the storm and stress of a general election campaign. In any case, electoral terms are not the only ones that matter. Labour may be able to win the next election by keeping its mouth shut, but it will not be able to govern the country by keeping its head empty. It will need a strategy of some kind – a sense of where it wants to go and of what its priorities are to be. The lesson of history is that if it fails to develop a strategy in opposition, it will be swept along by events once it is in government.

The 1945 government – the one really successful Labour government in British history – had a strong sense of direction and at least a broad-brush set of priorities. Though it fumbled badly on some questions it achieved most of what it set out to do; and most of its achievements stood the test of time. It owed its success to a number of factors – not least to its ability to speak to and for a broad-based popular coalition, extending well beyond the frontiers of its own core constituency. Its greatest single asset, however, was the programmatic legacy of the wartime coalition. Labour ministers knew where they were going because their course had been charted for them by the reports, enquiries and white papers of the preceding three or four years. They had, so to speak, internalised the wartime settlement which it was their vocation to implement. That was why they implemented it

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so successfully.

The 1945 government, however, stands out as a glittering peak among a series of molehills. The Macdonald government of 1929 and the Wilson government of 1974 were both overwhelmed by the pressures of a worldwide economic crisis which neither had foreseen. Both left a legacy of humiliation and acrimony which did terrible damage, not just to the Labour Party but to the whole centre Left. Perhaps it is unfair to blame them: it is at least arguable that they were the victims of circumstances which no government could have mastered. The fact remains that their failures were due, in large measure, to a fatal lack of strategic vision. They were shipwrecked partly because the currents were adverse, but partly because they had not realised where the rocks were waiting.

The 1964 government offers an even more salutary warning. Labour's position today is uncannily reminiscent of its position in the early 1960s. Then, as now, a thrice-victorious Conservative government suddenly and almost inexplicably lost its way. Then, as now, the Conservative Party was riven by internal dissension. Then, as now, a Labour Party which had seemed doomed to perpetual opposition dramatically recovered. Then, as now, its recovery was aided by a sharp, almost seismic, shift in the popular mood. Then, as now, the Labour leadership concentrated on short-term electoral tactics and forgot about long-term governmental strategy. The result was the Wilson government of 1964-70 – the most dismal wasted opportunity in the history of the British Left.

That does not mean that history is bound to repeat itself. Labour can almost certainly count on two years before the next election. It has time to put its strategic house in order – time to face and argue through the hard questions which a Labour government would have to answer. For all the glitz of the policy review, however, it has not done this yet. To be sure, it has laid the ghosts of hard-left Bennite socialism and Footite little-England insularity. It has abandoned Morrisonian nationalisation, top-down 'heroic' planning, the siege economy, unilateral disarmament and withdrawal from the European Community. In aspiration, at any rate, it is now another European social-democratic party committed to the mixed economy and further European integration.

The trouble is that it still balks at the logic of its own conversion. It has sloughed off its old skin, but it is not yet comfortable with its new one. It may be social-democratic in aspiration, but it is not yet social-democratic in assumption or mentality. It has abandoned the little-England, anti-European, socialism-in-one-country fantasies of 10 years ago, but (a handful of MEPs apart) it does not yet realise what support for further European integration entails. It is committed to Scottish devolution and flirts with regional devolution in England, but it has not abandoned the traditional Labourist reverence for the bankrupt institutions of the central British state. Above all, it has failed to see that the social-democratic political economies of central Europe and Scandinavia are, in a profound sense, negotiated political economies, and that the ethos and style of a negotiated political economy are poles apart from the ethos and style of majoritarian democracy on the British pattern.

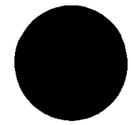
Thus, it is enthusiastically in favour of the Brussels Commission's social charter, guardedly sympathetic towards the first stage of the Delors plan for monetary union, properly anxious about the democratic deficit in Community decision-making, but strangely silent about the Community's response to the extraordinary European upheaval of the last 12 months. Yet it is clear that European politics are in flux, in a sense which has not been true since the beginning of the cold war. It is clear too that Britain's future is bound to be shaped, for good or ill, by what happens on the other side of the Channel; that she can no more stand aside from the changes which are now re-shaping the continent to which she belongs than she could stand aside from the rise of fascism in the 1930s, from the French Revolution in the 1790s or from the reformation in the 16th century. Finally, it is clear that the most serious single charge against Mrs Thatcher – outweighing even the charges against her management of the domestic economy – is that she has deliberately excluded herself from the debate which will determine the outcome of these changes.

That, of course, is the gravamen of Michael Heseltine's critique of the government and the basis for his increasingly impressive campaign for the Tory leadership. But where Heseltine offers an alternative vision of Europe and of Britain's place in Europe, Kinnock and his lieutenants have so far offered only a strangulated mumble. Even by the narrow calculus of electoral advantage and disadvantage, this is almost certainly a mistake. There is every chance that the European question will split the Conservatives as badly in the 1990s as it split Labour in the 1970s. Labour has nothing to lose by keeping that pot on the boil, and it may have a lot to gain.

Much more importantly, a Labour government will have to make up its mind where it stands on the great issues of Europe's future. Will it be for the minimalist, de-regulated, businessmen's Europe of the CBI or for the social Europe implied by the social charter? Assuming the latter, does it recognise that a social Europe will need stronger political institutions, more transfers of competence and authority from the national to the supranational level and therefore tighter constraints on the freedom of action of British ministers, including British Labour ministers?

Does it realise that the logic of the 1992 project implies not merely the first stage of the Delors plan for monetary union, but the second and third stages as well? How, above all, does it see the relationship between the little Europe of the Community and the greater Europe of which the Community is only a part? Does it recognise, as Heseltine seems to, that 'widening' and 'deepening' go together: that the inevitable enlargement of the Community to the east, of which the approaching reunification of Germany is only the first stage, necessitates, like the 1992 project, stronger and more authoritative Community institutions? And does it see that a stronger and more authoritative Community must also be a more democratic Community, with a stronger Community parliament? In office, Labour will have to answer these questions one way or another. The time to start thinking about them is now; and if its claims to have become a party of government again are to be taken seriously it will have to reveal the results of its thinking to the rest of us.

'Understandably, Labour has reacted with a demure negativism reminiscent of the three wise monkeys'



What applies to the community applies equally to the structure of the British state. Once Scottish devolution is on the agenda the government of England and Wales is on the agenda as well: it is impossible to separate power by area in one part of a hitherto unitary state and leave the rest unaffected. In the 1970s, Scottish devolution ran into the sands largely because the instinctively centralist Callaghan government (aided and abetted, it must be said, by an instinctively centralist parliamentary Labour Party) had failed to think through the implications of its legislation for the rest of the United Kingdom. A similar failure in the 1990s would destroy the government responsible for it and might well provoke the Scots to secede from the union altogether. Here again Labour simply cannot afford to fly, Wilson-like, by the seat of its pants. Here again, the guarded hints of the policy review are nothing like enough.

Behind all these questions lies the much more fundamental question of what social democracy implies for political and economic governance. Social democracy as it is practised in Scandinavia and central Europe (and it is not of course a uniform practice) represents an originally second-best compromise which has become a first-best outcome. It sprang from no theoretical blueprint. It emerged, unplanned, from the pressures and contingencies of a generation of social and political change. Yet, with all its theoretical imperfections, it *is* the much-sought 'third way' between the casino capitalism of Britain and the United States and the now- collapsing command economies of what used to be the Soviet bloc. It is far from utopian, either in conception or in conduct. It is a little heavy-handed, rather slow-moving, perhaps somewhat dull. Yet it gives a fairer and more civilised life to more of its citizens than any other kind of political economy in human history. Its hallmarks are negotiation, compromise, consensus and power-sharing. The power-hoggers of the Labour Party are still, alas, a long way from learning its lessons. ●

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Labour's Forward March
Centre Of Attraction

Labour's surge is unparalleled since 1945. **Ivor Crewe** gives chapter and verse and explains what it all means

The Labour Party is enjoying an extraordinary surge of popular support. Mid-Staffordshire clocked up the largest Conservative-to-Labour by-election swing for over 50 years. In the opinion polls, Labour's lead over the Conservatives doubled from 11% in January to 24% in March, the equivalent of a Commons majority of over 250 seats. At the last election 10m people voted Labour; now 16m people say they would. Even allowing for Labour's low baseline in 1987, for mid-term blues and by-election fever, this is a quite exceptional turnaround of party fortunes. A 24% lead is a 24% lead.

This seismic national shift has broken the electoral fixtures of the past decade. In the 1980s Labour was a regional class party of dispossessed minorities. It was left to represent the have-nots, while the have-somes teamed up with the have-lots behind the Conservatives. The only groups giving Labour majority support were the poor, the unemployed, black people and council tenants. Now the only group not putting it ahead are the professional and managerial salariat. It is more popular than the Conservatives in every other class, including white-collar office workers; among home-owners (outright owners as well as mortgagees); in all age groups, including the retired, and in all regions, including the south east outside London. The have-somes have changed sides and it is the Conservatives' turn to be a regional class rump and Labour's to be a national party.

What do these 6m extra voters signify? Are they committed converts or temporary refugees? Four interpretations are going the rounds. The first is that Labour is benefiting from the collapse of the centre and the reversion to the old two-party system. The second is that the Thatcherite revolution has been devoured by its children as the property-owning dream has turned into the mortgage-paying nightmare. The third is that voters have at last finished their fling with Thatcherism and returned to the safe social democracy of a reformed Labour Party.

All three interpretations offer optimistic prognoses for Labour. A fourth interpretation is more sceptical: Labour is merely benefiting from an intense but ephemeral protest by a volatile electorate which will melt as quickly as it materialised. There is substance to all these arguments, but none paint a complete picture.

The slump in the centre vote – from 23% in 1987 to about 10% now – is clearly a major factor in Labour's revival. The ex-Alliance vote held up surprisingly well in the polls and by-elections until spring 1989. It finally snapped after the Richmond by-election, where the SDP and Liberal Democrats, by refusing to agree on a single candidate, let the Conservative win despite securing 54% of the vote between them. In the Euro-elections four months later it limped behind the Greens in fourth place.

What needs to be explained is why despairing centre supporters switched in overwhelming proportions to Labour rather than dividing evenly between the two big parties, as surveys suggest they would have done in 1983 and 1987.

The fortuitous timing of Labour's policy review was one factor. Between Richmond and the Euro-elections it became apparent that Kinnock was abandoning Labour's 'something-for-nothing' unilateralism and would carry a majority of the national executive committee (NEC). This completed Labour's metamorphosis from socialist chrysalis to social-democratic butterfly. On macro-economic policy, on the role of the market, on public services, on privatisation and the public sector, on Europe, on trade-union democracy and finally on defence, Labour's policy review had adopted positions barely a millimetre away from the SDP's of 1987.

Indeed, Labour's transformation went beyond policy. Kinnock was spearheading a campaign to restructure the party precisely along the lines that the Social Democrats wanted, but failed to secure, in the early 1980s – one-member-one-vote locally, the end to the block vote nationally, a reversal of mandatory re-selection and the transfer of policy-making away from the NEC. All that separated the Liberal Democrats from Labour by summer 1989 was proportional representation, incomes policy, party loyalty – and the ability to win office. A committed Liberal or SDP voter, loyal to party policy throughout the 1980s, had no reason to vote Labour at the beginning of the decade and every reason at the end. Why should ex-Alliance voters support the Liberal Democrats or SDP, who have no chance of winning power, when there is now available a new and bigger centre party which has?

The collapse of the centre can account for Labour catching up with the Conservatives, but not for its leaping into such a commanding lead. The other component in Labour's recovery is the willingness of large numbers of Conservatives – about one in six – to switch directly to Labour. This has not happened on the same scale since 1945: disillusioned Conservatives normally vote for the centre. Labour's occupancy of the centre ground is again part of the explanation. Why should Conservative deserters stop at the Liberal Democrat hut when the modern Hotel Labour is next door?

'Thatcher's children' is the other explanation. As Table 1 shows, Labour has advanced furthest among the 'new working class' of affluent and secure skilled workers with homes of their own in the south and Midlands – the groups that deserted Labour in 1979 for Thatcher's brave new England. The Conservative-to-Labour swing since 1987 has been particularly sharp among the C2 class of skilled manual workers (20%), working-class home-owners (20%) and voters in the non-metropolitan south-east (23%) and east Midlands (21%). The shift to Labour in Scotland, in the north of England and in the traditional working class of semi- and unskilled workers and council tenants has been less marked.

The class impact of high interest rates has clearly been a factor. Spiralling mortgages have turned affluent workers into struggling bourgeois. The people hardest hit are those who stretched their household incomes to the limit to start on or climb up the housing ladder – typically young, two-earner couples of skilled workers, technicians and office staff.

But the importance of high interest rates should not be overdone. They are nasty for borrowers but nice for savers – and net savers outnumber borrowers. Less than 40% of voters are mortgagees. The Harris/ITN exit-poll in Mid-Staffordshire reported that mortgage rates was only the third most important issue in voters' minds, lagging well behind the health service and, overwhelmingly, the poll tax.

Commentators assume that the poll tax has hit the same people as high mortgage rates; hence the sudden haemorrhaging of Conservative support. The true picture is more complex. Generally, those least affected by high mortgages have been most affected by the poll tax. The people worst affected

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Table 1: The surge to Labour since the 1987 election
% shift in party support, June 1987 - March 1990

	Cons	Lab	Lib Dem & SDP	Con to Lab swing*
All	-15	+20	-12	17.5%
Men	-15	+21	-12	18%
Women	-14	+20	-12	17%
18-24	-20	+19	-12	19.5%
25-44	-11	+21	-16	16%
45-64	-18	+22	- 8	19%
65+	-13	+18	- 8	15.5%
Prof & managerial (AB)	-13	+18	-14	15.5%
Clerical & office (C1)	-15	+20	-12	17.5%
Skilled manual (C2)	-17	+23	-13	20%
Semi/unskilled manual (DE)	-12	+17	-10	14.5%
Outright owners	-16	+21	-10	18.5%
Mortgagees	-14	+22	-16	18%
Council tenants	-12	+17	- 8	14.5%
Private tenants	-20	+22	-11	21%
Working-class home owners	-17	+23	-14	20%
Working-class tenants	-13	+18	- 9	15.5%
Scotland	- 6	+ 8	-11	7%
North	-13	+20	-12	16.5%
Wales	-16	+24	-13	20%
Midlands	-15	+20	-11	15.5%
London	-14	+17	-11	15.5%
South outside London	-17	+22	-12	19.5%

Sources: BBC/Gallup survey, 10-11 June 1987; Gallup 9000, March 1990.
* 'Swing' is the average of the change in the Conservative and Labour shares of the vote.

Table 2: Labour fitness to govern

Question: 'How competent do you think the Labour Party is to manage the country's affairs?'	Oct	Jan	Change
Very/fairly competent	37	50	+13
Not very/not at all competent	59	42	- 17
Net competence rating	-22	+ 8	+30

Question: 'Do you think that the Labour Party is united or divided at the present time?'	June 1987	March 1990	Change
United	24	50	+26
Divided	72	40	- 32

'Labour has become too extreme'	April 1987	Sept 1989	Change
Agree	67	29	- 38
Disagree	24	61	+37

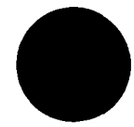
Source: Gallup.

Table 3: Economic prospects under a Labour government

Question: 'I would now like to ask you some questions about the prospects for Britain if Labour wins the next general election. Do you think . . .	Sept 1989	March 1990
. . . the economy would be stronger under Labour than the Conservatives?		
Stronger	18	21
About the same	34	30
Weaker	42	39
% stronger minus % weaker	-24	-18
. . . taxes for the average family would be higher?		
Lower	21	18
About the same	32	33
Higher	40	42
% lower minus % higher	-19	-24
. . . prices would rise faster under Labour?		
Slower	18	19
About the same	48	38
Faster	28	35
% slower minus % higher	-10	-16
. . . your own standard of living would be higher?		
Higher	n.a.	23
About the same	n.a.	44
Lower	n.a.	27
% higher minus % lower		- 4

Source: NOP for *The Independent*, March 17, 1990.

'In the 1980s Labour was a regional class party of dispossessed minorities. Now the only group not putting it ahead are the professional and managerial salariat'



are tenants (with no rates bills) and occupiers of older, smaller property with a low rateable value – typically retired people on relatively low incomes. Together the poll tax and rising mortgages have spread the electoral damage rather than concentrated it.

This is reflected in the swing figures for different social groups. What stands out are the similarities, not the differences. The swing barely differs between men and women, first-time voters and their grandparents, boiler suit and white collar, outright owners and mortgagees, London and the north of England. Labour has advanced along a remarkably broad front.

Consensual shifts of this kind reflect a politics of national mood rather than a politics of group interest. They should alert us against misinterpreting Labour's surge in terms of specific issues or identities. If the national mood has changed, what was it before and what has it become?

Sylvia Heal, Labour's victor at Mid-Staffordshire, gave an answer by way of interpretation three. The electorate had finally rejected Thatcherite values of selfishness and greed and voted for a more caring Britain. In one sense this was naive nonsense. The electors did not send her to Westminster in a blinding flash of moral revulsion against Thatcherism. The very opposite; they deserted the Conservatives because Mrs Thatcher was no longer delivering the goods. 'Selfishness' fuelled the Labour vote of 1990 as much as the Conservative vote of 1987.

In another sense, however, she touched upon an important truth. Whatever their motives for voting Conservative, the British public has never accepted Thatcherism as a public philosophy. At the 1987 election, despite the Conservatives' handsome win, Thatcherite values and proposals were rejected by large majorities. Tax cuts? Only 12% supported a cut in taxes, even at the expense of public services; fully 88% said they wanted an extension of public services 'even if it means some increase in taxes'. The jewel in the Thatcherite crown, privatisation? As many believed it would concentrate wealth (50%) as spread prosperity (50%). Trade unions? A 71% to 17% majority described them as a good thing 'Generally speaking and thinking of Britain as a whole' and 70% to 21% disagreed that 'trade unions may have been needed at one time in Britain but not any longer'. As for specific proposals, the poll tax was rejected by 54% to 28%, the privatisation of electricity by 56% to 34% and the 'opting out' of schools by 54% to 46%.

Opinion on these issues has shifted even further leftwards since 1987, but not by much – and certainly not as much as the *shift in voting intention from Conservative to Labour*. There has been no sea-change of values from Thatcherism for the simple reason that Thatcherism was

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not the prevailing value system in the first place. The traditions of welfare, collective provision and public services, traditions on which Labour could always draw, never lost their popular legitimacy.

In the 1980s people voted for the Conservative Party despite its policies, and against Labour despite its values. In their study of the 1983 election (*How Britain Votes*) Heath *et al* worked out that if everybody had voted for the party they preferred on the specific issue that mattered to them most, the result would have been a dead heat. The Conservatives won because most people do not vote like that. What matters most – even more than the economy – is the purely political question of whether the party is fit to govern. Policies and values enter into that judgment but carry less weight than, in rough order of importance, party unity, recent track record (especially on the economy), 'strong leadership', sense of purpose, policy coherence and personal rectitude. In 1979, electors turned against the Labour government because its authority collapsed during the winter of discontent. In 1983, they turned further against Labour because the party was riven by faction and weakly led. In 1987, its recovery was limited because it was still regarded as divided and 'extreme'.

What has changed since 1987 is not the electorate's values but its perceptions of the Labour Party. And the perceptions that have shifted most are not of Labour's values or policies but of its capacity to govern (see Table 2). Labour is safe and respectable again; it no longer frightens the middle classes. For the first time in over a decade, substantial majorities regard Labour as united, moderate and competent. Indeed, in a reversal of the psephological norm, Labour is seen as more united than the Conservatives, and as having a leader who would make as good a prime minister as the actual incumbent. Mandelson's magic and Kinnock's 'no risk' strategy have worked – so far.

Management of the economy is a crucial ingredient of governing capacity. Tucked away in the small print of the polls, however, are hints of the electorate's lingering scepticism about Labour's abilities in this respect (Table 3). In March, when the public was exceptionally pessimistic about economic prospects and criticism of the government's handling of the economy reached a 10-year high, there was precious little faith in the Labour alternative. Asked about life under a Labour government, a large minority thought it would be the same, and of the remainder pessimists outnumbered optimists. More voters thought that taxes would rise (42%) than fall (18%), that inflation would speed up (35%) than slow down (19%), that the economy would get weaker (39%) rather than stronger (21%) and that their own standard of living would be lower (27%) not higher (23%). Significantly, the balance of opinion had barely changed since the preceding autumn despite inflation, mortgage rises and poll tax. The Conservatives still have the reputation for prosperity, Labour for recession.

'Together the poll tax and rising mortgages have spread the electoral damage rather than concentrated it'

By avoiding all electoral risks the Labour Party has maximised its chances of benefiting from government mistakes. If interest and inflation rates remain high, if the Conservatives are divided and demoralised, most of Labour's 6m new voters will stay Labour. The public expects Conservative governments to be competent not compassionate, creators not spreaders of wealth. If the Conservatives come to be regarded as no more adept at managing the economy than Labour, voters will choose between the parties on more specific policy grounds, such as the poll tax, the NHS, jobs and pensions, on which Labour is far more trusted.

The weakness in Labour's strategy will be exposed if inflation and interest rates are tumbling fast in the run-up to a spring 1992 election and the Conservatives present a united and confident face to the electorate. Then Labour will be penalised for its lack of vision, or even one big idea. Voters will perceive the choice to be between two teams of politicians differing little in direction or principle. The salient distinction will turn on experience and past performance. And when that judgment comes to be made, many of Labour's extra 6m might float away.●

new left review

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NLR 180

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Europe's Vale Of Tears

The countries of Eastern Europe are on the move. But where to? **Ralf Dahrendorf** discusses their prospects for finding freedom

Cheers for the Czech revolution, but where do they go from here?

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Mike Abrahams/Network

There are many theories of the transition from capitalism to socialism, but none for that from socialism to capitalism. This at any rate is one of the standard comments on the events of the last year. It is true that from Marx to Hayek (*Road To Serfdom*) the probability if not inevitability of the collapse of market economies and the rise of collectivism has been argued, though it has actually not happened anywhere. Russia in 1917 was hardly capitalist, and the capitalist United States was never threatened by collapse. On the other hand, nearly all countries of really existing socialism are now undergoing profound transformations, and many are seeking precisely the kind of society and economy for which theorists of doom predicted collapse, revolution and death. So what about the gap in our understanding?

Clearly it is not as total as is sometimes claimed. 'Transitions' have become quite a fashionable notion in analyses of Latin American, Asian and south European experiences. Yet their relevance to the countries of East Central Europe and the revolution of 1989 is limited. For one thing, none of the earlier countries on the road to freedom had to cope with the same near-total monopoly of a party over state, economy and society. In the communist world, the three were indeed almost indistinguishable. There was no such thing as society, or an economy, or indeed the state; there was only the party pervading everything else. In the Latin countries, on the other hand, the more typical picture was one of relatively thriving unsocial market economies protected by authoritarian dictatorships, which left those alone who were prepared to withdraw to their private niches, but clamped down on any sign of active or even passive opposition. This was also the case in the Philippines and Korea, and perhaps elsewhere in Asia. The Portuguese 'revolution of carnations' may sound as appealing as the Czechoslovak 'velvet revolution', but in fact the notion of revolution is much more applicable to Eastern Europe, where all-encompassing claims of the ruling *nomenklatura* had to be broken.

At the political level the temptation is great to begin with constitutional change. Nor is this just a temptation; the need is clear if the monopoly is to be broken. But changing the rules of the game is a necessary condition of the road to freedom, it is not a sufficient condition. When the French Revolution had taken its final turn for the worse, and people were rioting because they had nothing to eat, an angry Robespierre addressed the convention. 'What is this,' he said, 'they have the Republic and they cry for bread? Only tyrants give bread to their subjects. What the constitution owes to the French people is freedom, cemented by humane laws. It is the enjoyment of the sacred rights of humanity and the exercise of all the social virtues that the Republic develops.' Gorbachev, fortunately, is no Robespierre, and Robespierre hardly stands for freedom and humane laws, but one can hear the president of the Soviet Union utter a similar sigh: what is this, they have free speech and elections and they moan about empty shelves in the shops? Man certainly does not live by bread alone, but nor does he, or she, live by glasnost and perestroika, or even democracy alone.

Let me not pursue the story of the French Revolution all the way to disenchantment and beyond, at least not yet. If dire predictions of gloom were the only answer, it would be better to suffer in silence. What we are facing here is one of the more vexing issues of modern history, which is the relationship between political and economic reform, with social change thrown in at both ends. Clearly there is no simple answer. Deng Xiaoping may have hoped that he could stimulate economic activity at the local level and beyond without awakening the goddess of democracy. The students of Tiananmen Square gave him the answer, and his counterblast destroyed economic initiative along with demands for political participation. Mikhail Gorbachev may have hoped that he could release economic forces by lifting political pressure. Once people were free to speak, to learn from abroad, to form co-operatives, even to make a little money, they would grasp their new opportunities and put the Soviet economy on a sustained path to growth (or so he thought). In fact, little happened, and worse, economic conditions deteriorated while political reform became more hectic. Ever new constitutional changes were thrown at an electorate which increasingly wanted bread rather than the Republic. The conflict may yet be the undoing of a great experiment of change.

Nor are the dilemmas of Deng Xiaoping and Gorbachev the only problems raised by the relationship of political and economic reform. Even if a country succeeds, as Poland did in August 1989, in bringing to power a new government which commands the respect of the people, and embarks on an economic course intended to stimulate initiative and create market conditions, a highly explosive predicament is bound to arise. It has to do with time-scales. Basic constitutional changes can be introduced in a matter of months. They are moreover, at least at first sight, a pure gain for all except the old *nomenklatura* whom everybody wants to lose anyway. Basic economic changes cannot be introduced in a matter of months. At any rate, they will not become effective immediately. On the contrary, they will without fail lead through a valley of tears. Things are bound to get worse before they get better. Even if a policy brings goods to the shops and creates a currency of real value without black-market exchange rates, there will be many who earn too little to afford the goods, if they are employed at all. It is hard to tell how long the trek through the valley of tears will take, but certain

'Even if a determined policy brings goods to the shops and creates a currency of real value without black-market exchange rates, there will be many who earn too little to afford the goods'

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Evening: PAVILION
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FRIDAY 11 MAY: CARDIFF, UNIVERSITY
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that it takes longer than the lifetime of the first parliament and always likely that it engenders a degree of disillusionment which threatens the new constitutional framework along with the economic reforms which proised so much but could not deliver in time.

What then is to be done? I shall try to give a fairly systematic answer and indicate three processes which are required in parallel on the road to freedom. There is no necessary, inescapable path to freedom, nor is there a royal road ahead. What is suggested here is threatened and can fail at every stage. Freedom does not just happen, it has to be created. Moreover, its creation is full of pitfalls and surprises; in the end it will probably come about in much less systematic ways than any map of its route suggests. It also takes a good deal of luck to reach the destination. If adverse forces issue from the stars, or the neighbours, if the right people fail to come up at the right time, if inevitable small mistakes turn out to have uncontrollably large consequences, much may be lost. But as we think about the course of human endeavour, we cannot just visualise a sinister road to serfdom; there is the prospect of a road to freedom as well.

'Civil society is the key. It pulls the divergent time-scales and dimensions of political and economic reform together'

Its first stage is about the constitution. It is the hour of the lawyers. By that I mean those who have the imagination and comparative experience to find a way out of the monopoly of the party and all subordinate monopolies too. This is the core issue, and it is not enough to remove the relevant article from existing constitutions.

A number of requirements come to mind. They are listed here without claim to completeness. Basic rights have to be promulgated. There are of course plenty of conventions and bills of rights which did not prevent Stalin from killing millions and the *nomenklatura* in all communist countries from arbitrarily arresting and torturing people, from censoring all publications, from preventing people travelling and choosing their employment, and curtailing other elementary liberties.

However, the key to giving basic rights the teeth which they need to bite is the rule of law. In theory, it is not an easy concept to establish. What if the law itself is rotten? In the early weeks of his rule, Hitler pushed a number of laws through what was left of the last elected Reichstag under the Weimar constitution which remind us that the rule of law is more than the rule of laws of any description. In fact, the Enabling Law established precisely the kind of monopoly which now needs to be demolished.

In practice, the issue is not as difficult. The rule of law is not just about having legal texts to refer to; it is about the effective substance of those texts. This in turn can only be guaranteed by an independent judiciary which is seen to be incorruptible and fair, and which includes those who guard the constitution itself and its principles.

This too is a tall order. It concerns the many lower-level judges who had administered communist 'laws' quite happily, and without any outward signs of dismay. Replacing those at the top without politicising the judiciary, and grooming a new generation to enter at the bottom, is probably the only realistic answer, even if it obviously takes much longer than the six months I have allowed for constitutional change.

The rule of law is of course all-pervasive, at least so far as the rules of the democratic game are concerned. These require much thought themselves. Rather than write about federalism, electoral systems, party finance, two-chamber arrangements and the like, I want to reiterate one point of principle. Nobody can fail to understand that as you construct the constitution of liberty out of the ruins of the old monopoly, the first concern is how to divide and dissipate power. 'Let there be as much democracy as possible!' is the maxim on most constitution-builders' minds, and by democracy they mean not only the power of the people but above all the absence of power in the hands of the few, whoever they are. Thus proportional representation and referenda are piled upon decentralisation, administrative review and parliamentary prerogative. One wants to know how to dismiss governments rather than how to make them strong. This is all very well, but it may add to one's woes, especially in view of the vexing relation between politics and economics. In the valley of tears one wants to make sure that government keeps its nerve and is not thrown off course by the kind-hearted desire to soothe people's pain, which bodes disaster in the medium term. The important point is to find a proper system of checks and balances on the one hand, and the ability of governments to govern on the other.

This then leads us back to the economic elements which belong in the constitution rather than the realm of normal politics. There are certain basic economic freedoms like private property and contract. Constitutional economists would like to go much further. Relations between the central bank and government, for example, raise an important question, and there is much to be said for an independent central bank. The key yet again is the break-up of all forms of monopoly. Anything that smacks of a state monopoly over economic processes has to be removed from the basic rules of the game.

So much for the hour of the (constitutional) lawyers. Next there is the hour of the politicians. After the constitution, normal politics takes over. Even as I write this, I feel that as it is put here it might be misleading. I am not really talking about an organised sequence of events, with constitution-building first and economic policy next. In fact, both processes have to be set in motion at the same time. This is where the incompatible time-scales of political and economic reform become relevant, and each threatens the other. Did I hear Lech Walesa say in a recent speech that perhaps democracy has to be suspended for a while in order to allow economic reforms to proceed? I have certainly heard those in Czechoslovakia who would like to slow down economic change in order to preserve democracy.

How are such contradictions to be made bearable? Some think that the answer is something like a 'social market economy'. They believe in a 'third way' between the systems. In fact they know little about the German experience after the war, which is that of a combination of apparent incompatibles, *market liberalism and Catholic social* doctrines. Clearly it takes more than one political leader to achieve this feat. Somebody has to provide the protection of political power, somebody has to have the practical courage to take an economy from central planning to more open pastures, and somebody has to insist on social policies which are themselves appropriate and also make the harsher side-effects of the new-found market bearable. Mazowiecki, Balcerowicz and Kuron in Poland perhaps? I do not know. Nor is it likely that many countries will be blessed with all three at one and the same time. But in terms of the normal politics of transition it is clearly highly desirable. The fact that Gorbachev has not found such a constellation may well be one of the reasons why his perestroika is such a failure.

The formal process of constitutional reform takes at least six months; a general sense that things are moving up as a result of economic reform is unlikely to spread before six years have passed; the third condition of the road to freedom is to provide the social foundations which transform the constitution and the economy from fine-weather into all-weather institutions which can withstand the storms generated within and without, and 60 years are barely enough to lay these foundations. We are actually witnessing a great historical test of such an attempt at this time, as the Federal Republic of Germany is challenged after 40 years of steady development by German unification and a new role in Europe to prove the mettle of its democracy, prosperity and civil society. Civil society is the key. It pulls the divergent time-scales and dimensions of political and economic reform together. It is the ground in which both have to be anchored in order not to be blown away. The hour of the lawyer and the hour of the politician mean little without the hour of the citizen.

Civil society is fashionable in East Central Europe. Timothy Garton Ash has described its 'central role in opposition thinking': 'There should be forms of association, national, regional, local, professional, which would be voluntary, authentic, democratic and, first and last, not controlled or manipulated by

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the party or party-state. People should be "civil": that is, polite, tolerant and above all, non-violent. Civil and civilian. The idea of citizenship had to be taken seriously.' Garton Ash thinks that 'ordinary men and women's rudimentary notion of what it meant to build a civil society might not satisfy the political theorist.'[1] If it does not, one reason has to do with time horizons. The voluntary, authentic, democratic associations of the honeymoon of change can collapse and die as quickly as they have been brought to life. There were tears when the East German New Forum ended up with 2.9% in the elections, and some Forum-type groups in the other countries have since joined the same route to oblivion. Adam Michnik, by temperament and circumstance always in a hurry, has described the first year of Solidarity as 'the promise of a civil society'. I heard him say: 'When we realised that we were slaves, we knew that we had become citizens.' Moving words, but words about citizens at heart rather than in the real world. When TH Marshall wrote about citizenship in Britain, he allowed three centuries for the blossoming of the idea. *Building* institutions, and a civil society at that, is a profoundly difficult notion.

'The history of some countries has become a cemetery of constitutions. In the end nobody trusts their paper promises any more than paper money when inflation runs at 2,000%'

For Adam Michnik, Janos Kis and many 'ordinary men and women', civil society is about substantial sources of power outside the state, and more often than not, against the state. It means that a tight network of autonomous institutions and organisations is created which has not one but a thousand centres and can therefore not easily be destroyed by a monopolist in the guise of a government or a party. Civil society in a certain sense sustains itself. It does not seem to need the state. One thinks of Italian society, Mafia and all, though this codicil indicates the risk which a civil society runs if there are not at the same time certain rules and procedures binding on all. This is why I prefer to think of civil society as providing the anchorage for the constitution of liberty including its economic ingredients. Both are needed, civil society and the state, but they each have their own raison d'être and autonomous reality.

Can one *build* a civil society in this sense? We must try. Citizenship certainly can be built. The entitlements associated with membership of a society – a national society until there is a world society – are a matter of legislation and supporting policies. Civil, political and social rights must become a part of the fabric of the social and political community. The creative chaos of organisations, associations and institutions is not as easily built, and should perhaps not be the task of deliberate construction at all. Such deliberateness is all too likely to end up with a Brasilia rather than a Rio de Janeiro, an artifical construct which people love to escape for the nooks and crannies of the real thing. Variety must be encouraged; the task of deliberate action is one of enabling rather than planning or even building. Small business must be allowed and promoted. The media must be free and pluralistic in outlook. Political parties must be properly financed and independent of the state. Major institutions must be allowed to govern themselves even if their wherewithal depends in part on government. Licensing processes for voluntary organisations must be reduced to a bare minimum. The law as well as levels and methods of taxation must encourage the setting up of foundations and other vehicles of philanthropy. A principle of subsidiarity should pervade the whole community by which the state only enters the scene when nobody else can be persuaded to perform.

All this and much else is a tall order, and yet it is far from sufficient. If autonomy can be given, it can also be taken away. If organisations depend on funding, and public funding at that, they are always at risk. The secret of the USA is of course that civil society was there first, and the state came later, by the grace of civil society, as it were. Similarly in England, absolutist rulers never prevailed over the barons and other sources of local power to the extent to which they did on the continent. Switzerland is even today more a civil society, if a pretty organised one, than a state. On the other hand, countries which had to create civil society after the event were and are in trouble. Here, citizens have to borrow power from those whom they want to keep in check.

This is notably true in the post-communist world. 'We the people' are fine, but in one sense a mirror image of the total state which has just been dislodged. If the monopoly of the party is replaced merely by the victory of the masses all will be lost before long, for the masses have no structure and no permanence. Once again, Poland is lucky, as Adam Michnik noticed, and one must hope that the relative retreat of the church and the probable fragmentation of Solidarity will not destroy the principles on which its national freedom is based. The key question is how to fill the gap – sometimes, as in Romania, one of frightening dimensions – between the state and the people with activities which by their autonomy create social sources of power. Before this is achieved, the constitution of liberty and even the market economy, social or otherwise, will remain suspended in mid-air.

You will not have failed to notice that as I went on with this route-finder for the road to freedom (it is hardly a theory), the mood of my argument has become gloomier. The hour of the lawyer is euphoric and filled with visible progress; the hour of the politician is tense at times but exhilarating at others; the hour of the citizen drags on through numerous ups and downs, and its success can never really be measured. Let us face it, therefore: the entire route which I have tried to trace is full of pitfalls and risks. To repeat, freedom does not just happen. It has to be created; it has to be defended at every point of the process; the attempt can fail. Some sources of failure are obvious, and also hard to avoid. The right leaders may not come up, or those who lead may become faint-hearted. Not every country is lucky enough to have an Adenauer and an Erhard, or a Juan Carlos and an Adolfo Suarez, later a Felipe Gonzales at the same time. Still, the Polish leadership sets a good example, and there is Vaclav Havel in Prague. To some extent, great historical opportunities seem to find their masters.

More serious causes of failure arise from the project of freedom itself. In some post-communist countries it looks as if the collapse of the centre has reached proportions which make it difficult for any one or any group to hold things together sufficiently to bring about effective reform. East Germany seemed at one point close to this condition, but it is now saved by a unification which extends the legal and political structures of the Federal Republic to what used to be the GDR. Romania may be another example. Even where this is not the case, mistakes can be made at the constitutional level. It is hard to resist the temptation to let feelings of revenge get the better of the knowledge that the rule of law must prevail.

The Italian communist (or whatever he is called now) Sergio Segre was quite right when he attacked East Germans for arresting their former leader Erich Honecker: 'Will you never learn from history? Is the era of the trials of the 1930s and 1950s going to start all over again? These are politically beaten people; leave them in peace in their defeat; do not begin the old stories again. Otherwise one will never start anything new.' Latin America shows the consequences. Arguably the greatest weakness of the old states of Latin America is that most of them have never managed to give the rule of law reality in the institutions of society and the hearts and minds of the people. Their leaders and many of their people have either condoned the crimes of previous regimes or taken revenge. Condoning them destroys public morality, and revenge breeds violence. Neither is conducive to the establishment of liberty. The vicious circle must be broken.

Other constitutional mistakes are on the cards. The balance of democracy and leadership which I have advocated may not be reached at the first try. In fact, many of the initial rules may look unworkable or undesirable after they have been tried. Again one thinks of Latin America, though Germany provides another example. The history of some countries has become a cemetery of constitutions. In the end nobody trusts their paper promises any more than paper money when inflation runs at 2,000%. Among other strengths of the

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American constitution there is this: that it is short and lives by its amendments and the interpretations of the Supreme Court. Admittedly, the constitution also got it right in most respects. Britain has no written constitution at all, which may have been alright in the days of Edmund Burke but is certainly a deficiency today when it comes to the rule of law. I am not sure what to conclude from such observations, except that it is probably better for the constitution to err on the short side than to be too elaborate.

Then there is the dilemma of political and economic reform, the dangerous trip through the valley of tears. Whoever has embarked on it must not give up or turn back, and embarking on it is as indispensable as constitutional reform. But one does not have to go unprovisioned and unprotected. There is no need to make life harder than it is in any case; apart from emergency rations and a bit of entertainment at night, one can think of various forms of relief. The most important point to remember is that there is no such thing as a seamless economic policy, important though it is to have one reformer on board who has clear vision and the nerve to pursue it against many odds.

Failure looms large on the horizon as we seek the road to freedom. Disillusionment is almost inevitable, and worse states of mind and of affairs than mere disenchantment are conceivable. What would such failure mean? Where would it lead countries which have freed themselves of the monopoly of one-party *nomenklatura* socialism? Not, I am sure, back to the old regime. At least in its negative aspect, the revolution in Europe is an irreversible process.

The reason for this confident assertion is simple; one could probably spell it out by analysing the predicament of Gorbachev's 'conservative enemy' Yegor Ligachev. There are undoubtedly those members of the former *nomenklatura* who think back wistfully to the cosy world of Brezhnev, *dacha*, armoured limousines, 99% 'vote' and all. In due course, they will probably tell us that the old regime was not as bad as we now think, and in many ways preferable to the shambles which the revolution has left behind. But even if by some fluke they – say, Ligachev – gained supreme power, they could not do much more than tell all and sundry, 'I told you so'. The old regime was, in its last phase at least, a sham. It collapsed at fairly slight provocation. There was not only no popular support for it, which after the elections of 1990 is evident for all, but even without such support, state, party and economy had lost the ability to function. In this sense, communism is gone, never to return.

But as I have emphasised throughout, there are many alternatives of which the road to freedom is only one. It is quite conceivable that a Ligachev presides over a messy mixture of the half-hearted return to some form of central planning, a military which tries to maintain law and order and preserve the union, and sullen acceptance of continued misery by the people. In East Central Europe, many unhappy combinations are thinkable. Quickly-changing governments and even regimes which leave few traces other than a near total disenchantment are as possible as new political monopolies coupled with a degree of market conditions for the economy, and as prolonged states of confusion and disorientation.

The greatest risk is probably of another kind altogether. I hesitate to use the word, but it is hard to banish from one's thoughts: fascism. By that I mean the combination of a nostalgic ideology of community which draws harsh boundaries between those who belong and those who do not, with a new political monopoly of a man or a 'movement' and a strong emphasis on organisation rather than freedom of choice. The rule of law would be suspended; dissidents and deviants would be incarcerated; minorities would be singled out for popular wrath and official discrimination. Fascism in this sense need not be as horrific as German national socialism; systematic genocide is not a necessary consequence of its rule, though it is always likely. It is in any case a tyranny which has its origin in what we have got used to calling the Right, because it is allied with the forces of 'law and order' and appeals to reactionary sentiments, dreams of the purity of a bygone age rather than utopian visions of a better future. Also, such fascism can have many names, Mussolini and Franco, Peron and Pinochet.

'The greatest risk is probably of another kind altogether. I hesitate to use the word, but it is hard to banish from one's thoughts: fascism'

The reason why this risk comes to mind is not just the prospect of the valley of tears or even the seemingly irremediable collapse of the centre of authority. It is not even the possibility of a profound disenchantment on the part of a majority with the promises of democracy. The rise of anti-semitism, and of a nationalism which has little to do with the nation-state and much with ethnic homogeneity and resentment of those who are different, are more important factors. But above all, certain social processes are going on in at least some countries of East Central Europe (including, quite emphatically, the former German Democratic Republic) which bear an uncanny resemblance to the syndrome which gave birth to fascism in the 1920s.

Fascism above all thrives on the sudden impact of the forces of the modern industrial world on a society which is unprepared because it has retained many of the characteristics of an older, status-ridden, authoritarian age. The two simply do not match. Important groups find themselves dislocated and disoriented. They are stuck halfway between old and new. They hate capitalism as much as socialism, the newly rich as much as the newly poor. They are farmers and shopkeepers, but also members of the new middle class by status and education, civil servants, white-collar workers, even engineers. In this condition, a political movement which promises to destroy the present and return to the past has great appeal, and few recognise in time that there can be no return to old pastures. In effect, fascism is above all a destructive force, and soon crude power takes the place of all ideologies. But once people notice the trap into which they have walked, and the educated bourgeoisie begin to regret the early professions of loyalty which helped to stabilise a regime of terror, it is too late.

It would be quite wrong to apply this analysis to the post-communist world without important qualifications. For one thing, if communism is modernisation for latecomers, it is still a form of modernisation. For another thing, there are great differences between countries. Most have actually been through the purgatory, if not the hell, of fascism, and I firmly believe that in this respect as in others we do not step into the same rivers twice. But the extent to which outdated social structures have been preserved in the communist countries is striking. These may not be pre-industrial authoritarian structures; they resemble more our own conditions of Europe in the immediate postwar years. Philip Roth goes even further. 'There is still a pre-world war two varnish on the societies that, since the 40s, have been under Soviet domination. The countries of the satellite world have been caught in a time warp.' They awake with a shock, a personal shock to begin with. Roth quotes Helena Klimova to the effect that 'neurotics are getting worse' because all structure is gone and 'they are suddenly in a world of choices'. [2] Karl Heinz Bohrer has described the curious 'doppelganger' effect of East Germany on West Germans: West Germans are irritated because 'they see their history, their past come back to them'[3]. What do East Germans see? There is a sense of dislocation. Personal shocks are translated into social shocks. Dream and reality fall apart, unless someone comes along with the false promise to put them together again.

Is there a theory then of the transition from really existing socialism to the open society? There are ways of mapping the route, and we know the risks along it. Beyond that, it is perhaps the key point about the revolution of 1989 that there cannot be such a theory. If this revolution has any meaning, it is that we have left the world of History with a capital 'H' in which inexorable laws – Marxian laws, Hayekian laws – govern human behaviour, and have entered a more open – perhaps a Popperian – world. We can try to make progress, but we may go wrong, and the most important point is to make sure that we can mend our ways and try again. This is the road to freedom.●

1 Timothy Garton Ash, *We The People*, p147.
2 Philip Roth, 'A Conversation In Prague', *New York Review Of Books* April 12, 1990.
3 Karl Heinz Bohrer in *Merker*, March 1990, p188.
This article is based on a section of a book to be published later this year, entitled *Reflections On The Revolution In Europe*.

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Soul To Sole

The conventional wisdom is that the multinationals call the tune and the consumers dance to it. Well not with the sports shoe. **Alice Rawsthorn** tells the story

There is a scene in Spike Lee's film *Do The Right Thing* of a white cyclist steaming along a Brooklyn street on a hot, hot summer day. He bumps into Buggin' Out, one of the black kids hanging out on the street.

Buggin' Out is outraged. 'Not only did you knock me down, you stepped on my brand new Air Jordans... and that's all you can say, "excuse me",' he shrieks, and lunges towards the cyclist.

For a Brooklyn boy like Buggin' Out his Nike Air Jordans are not just a pair of sports shoes but a badge of pride. The real Buggin' Out will own as many as a hundred pairs of sports shoes costing anything from $50 to $150 each. All in all more than 44m pairs of sports shoes will be sold in the US this year.

For a handful of multinational manufacturers that dominate the $20 billion worldwide market, it all adds up to an extraordinarily buoyant business. But the market is changing, the axis of power is shifting away from the manufacturers towards the consumer.

It is not the technicians in Nike's research department or Reebok's marketing managers that dictate which styles will sell, but Brooklyn boys like Buggin' Out. The sports-shoe market is turning into a multinational's nightmare.

The sports shoe of today is the creation of three US companies, Nike, Reebok and Converse, which emerged in the 1980s. They used a combination of technical innovation and low-cost manufacturing to steal market share away from Adidas and Puma, the West German manufacturers that had dominated the market for decades.

These companies identified a need for smarter, more stylish shoes to suit the emerging sports of the 1980s. Nike went for running. Reebok for aerobics. They also developed a new system of subcontracting their manufacturing to companies in the low labour-cost economies of South Korea and Taiwan.

Soon sports shoes were worn by everyone from the Buggin' Outs in Brooklyn to the brokers and bankers on Wall Street and the clubbers in the night districts of Tokyo. Reebok, Nike and Converse were locked in a cycle of developing more and more styles and technical features to dangle in front of the consumer.

The sports shoe began the 1980s as an unremarkable product, the humble trainer, which came in a choice of canvas or leather in black and white. It ended the decade as one of the most sophisticated and sought-after consumer products.

Some sports shoes come in leather. Others are covered with fur. The choice of colours, styles and trimmings is endless. Some have air pumps in the soles. Others have inflatable tops. There are Alphas. There are Air Jordans. There is even a sports shoe called the Beast.

Reebok's Pump: Inflated soles and prices

Ostensibly the multinationals have got it made. They have one of the hottest products on the market. They even have low manufacturing costs. But the tables are turning. The multinationals are so locked into the cycle of innovation that

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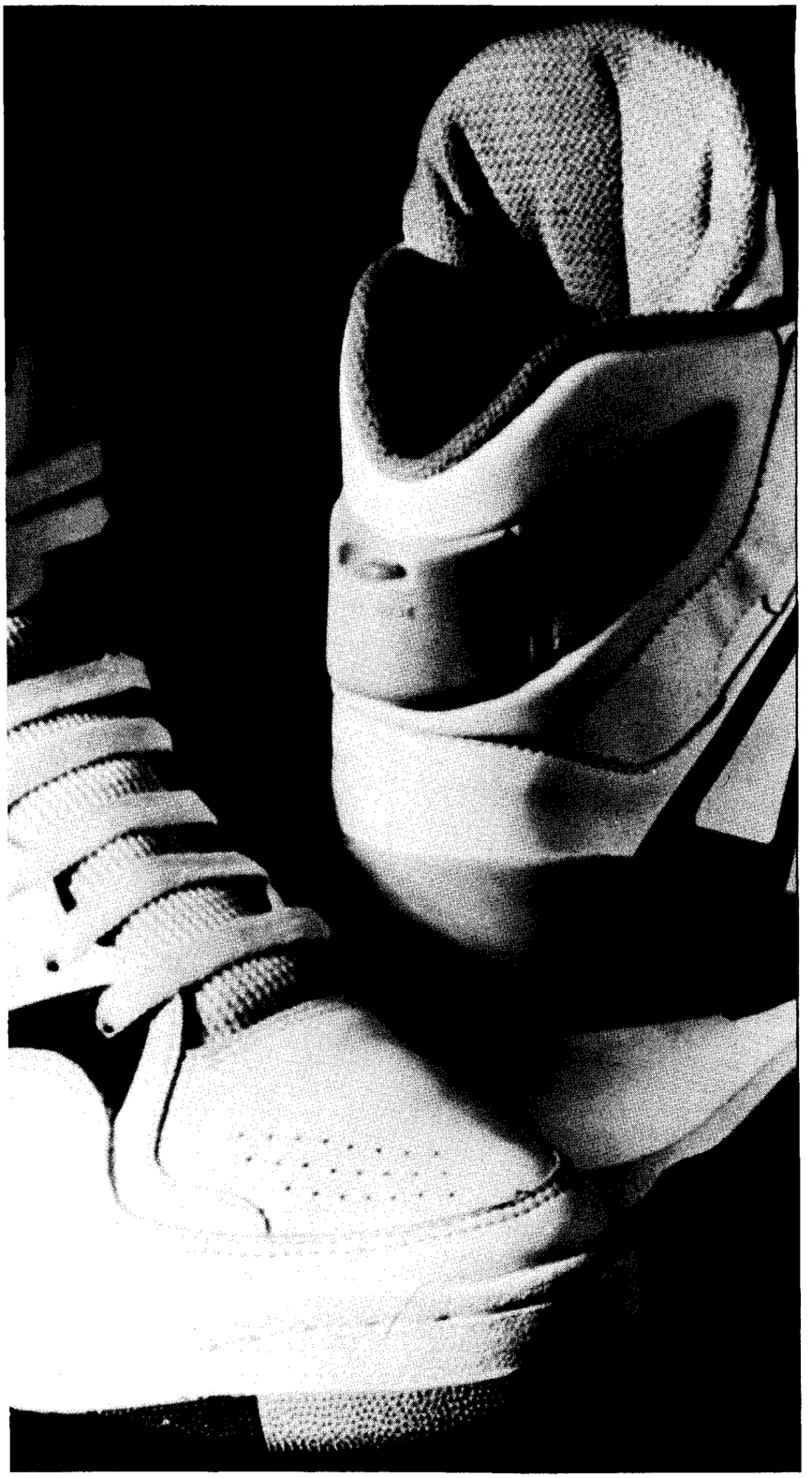

they have lost control of the market.

As soon as a new style or feature comes on to the market – the Pump by Reebok, a baseball boot with an inflatable sole, is the latest – the old sports shoes are dropped and the new style is taken up.

The culture of the sports shoe is textbook semiotics. In the States, the kids in one city go for one brand, and in a neighbouring town for another. Nike is hot in Chicago. In Philadelphia it is Adidas. Sometimes the styles and brands change from suburb to suburb, or even from street to street. The choice of shoe, whether the laces are tied or not, even if it is a matching pair, speaks volumes about where someone lives and who they hang out with.

The trends are set by the kids in the inner cities. The shoe worn today by the Puerto Rican kids along Bedford Avenue in Williamsburgh will soon spread to the suburbs and then out of New York over to the West Coast. It will then become big in Europe and even in the Far East.

The problem for the multinationals is that it is impossible to predict which type of shoe the kids will choose. A few years ago British Knights became popular in Los Angeles. But sales suddenly slumped when the local kids started calling them Brother Killers. In the London and Manchester clubs this spring there was a craze for plain Puma trainers, an anti-fashion protest against the hi-tech styles from the States. It is the consumers, not the multinationals, that decide whether a new shoe will be a hit or not.

The multinationals are faced with potentially a phenomenally profitable market. They *must* keep coming up with new styles to keep ahead of their competitors. Yet they are now in a situation where they can sink millions of dollars into developing a new product only to see it sink, inexplicably, without trace.

Even if a new product succeeds, a sudden slump in sales may mean that the company is lumbered with high stocks of unsaleable shoes. The fact that most companies import their shoes from cheap production sources in the Far East complicates the problem, because they place their orders so far in advance that it is difficult to respond to sudden changes in the marketplace.

The multinationals are developing defensive strategies. Converse gathers together groups of kids from the inner cities in the US to talk about the sort of trends and colours that they want to see. This forms the basis if its market research before it launches a new shoe.

Avia, one of the Reebok brands, sells small samples of new styles in a handful of inner-city stores on an experimental basis. It sees how sales go and monitors customers' comments. It then adapts the new shoe before going into full-scale production.

Nike has gone one step further. Given that it has little or no control over whether its shoes will sell, it has inroduced an inbuilt-obsolescence to its products by deleting most of its range every six months. This means that most of its styles are automatically withdrawn and replaced by new styles after only a few months on the market.

But the multinationals are still struggling. Puma once developed a new shoe specifically, or so it thought, for inner-city kids in the US. It went as far as it could to be wacky. It covered the shoe in fur. It even called it the Beast. But the Buggin' Outs of Brooklyn just didn't want to buy it. Maybe the cyclist did.●

'For a Brooklyn boy like Buggin' Out his Nike Air Jordans are not just a pair of sports shoes but a badge of pride'

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Dangerous Liaisons

The movement against the poll tax has been the broadest since 1979. Yet the organised movement against it has been appropriated by the ultra Left. **Beatrix Campbell** explains why

Eighty-five per cent of the population – that means most of any category you want to think of, from Tories to prisoners, from accountants to vegetarians – are passionately opposed to the poll tax. They organise their dissent in a thousand different ways – complaining to strangers at the bus stop about the fate of family and friends, shouting at the television, failing to fill in the forms, failing to post the filled-in forms, signing petitions, marching, lobbying, looting... .

It's a movement, of sorts, and it has de-stabilised the government for the first time in a decade – perhaps because it has provoked the first Tory rank-and-file revolt against its hitherto most triumphant regime. But this movement-of-sorts is, of course, much bigger than the Movement that claims to represent it. It's hard to recall a relationship of such infidelity. The movement-of-sorts and the Movement aren't on speaking terms, they don't even speak the same language.

What makes the resistance in England to the poll tax so remarkable is that it is so strongly sourced in popular feeling and yet so utterly unresourced by the straight, aka sensible, Left.

At the level of national initiative, the sensible Left has gone Awol, when it would once have hitched its horse to a national network and a national project. It has evacuated the terrain and left it free for Militant, the Socialist Workers Party and the young anarchist Class War to field a posse of headbangers who raid and wreck the movement-of-sorts, producing polarisation where there are compelling conditions for co-operation. And when the movement takes to the streets, the sectarian samurai poke their spears at police and loot the Body Shop. It's been enough to give rioting a bad name. What we've seen over the poll-tax spring hasn't been serious rioting so much as macho recidivism that has learned nothing and forgotten everything about our repertoire of creative, rather than destructive, direct action. It's like comparing a lager lout to Ho Chi Minh.

Nonetheless, judging by opinion polls, resistance to the poll tax seems resilient enough to have survived the cult of violence which bled all over that last weekend of March when Strangeways and Trafalgar Square combusted together. And it seems to have survived, too, the worst efforts of Labour and Tory leaders to convert the conversation from political strategy to law and order.

So why the absence of the sensible Left from the national campaign? While thousands of rank-and-file socialists and communists are active in poll tax resistance locally, how do we explain the abstention of their parties, as national parties, from the creation of any national initiative, and from that initiative once the Federation of Poll Tax Unions filled the vacuum? It is partly an English problem – in Scotland, where the prototype for the poll tax has already been imposed, and resisted, there's still life in the traditional Left. The readiness to resist is infused by Scots' cultural elan, which is where class consciousness, civil liberty and the quest for nationhood meet.

Under the aegis of the STUC, all the political parties in Scotland except the Tories gathered to launch a united campaign against the poll tax. This was rudely disrupted by interminable competition between the Scottish Nationalists and the Labour Party, but nonetheless a kind of coalition survived their worst party chauvinisms on the one hand and the movement's rather old-fashioned format on the other. The point is, however, that Scottish institutions, ranging from the Communist Party to the Catholic Church, organised resistance.

Why no equivalent in England? The answer lies in the different drifts of the Labour Party and the Communist Party. These have been instrumental formations since the war. They haven't been the only ones on the Left, of course, but they have often enough been decisive. Now we see the Communist Party in exponential decline, nay disintegration, leaving it paralysed, while by contrast Labour is constrained by its renaissance, which has been engineered by an impressive discipline directed towards one objective – the electoral defeat of Thatcherism. Labour by tradition tends to see activism and activists as jeopardising its electoral success. The thought of office always exiles Labour from popular politics. The CP has always seen itself as a generator of movement, and despite its distinct political project, often lived in the same political habitat as the Labour Party and the labour movement. Once party initiatives ricocheted around the labour movement. Now there's no smoking gun.

In five years' time the Communist Party may not exist. And in five years' time the Labour Party, having failed to expand its membership base to anywhere near the 1m it needed to match the Conservative Party, may drift in the direction of some European socialist parties – taking the form of a central opinion-forming caucus rather than a mass movement. The Communist Party's demise means much more than the end of an era, an era born in the Bolshevik big bang of 1917 and dead or dying in 1989. Without doubt the Communist Party is exhausted by its dialogue with its own history. Maybe that's because that's what 20th-century communism has become – history. But the party's crisis has been greater than its critique of its own past and stalinism, for it is a crisis it shares more generally with leftism and even labourism, a crisis lodged in man-made traditions of class and craft, in the artificial distinctions between parliamentary and extra-parliamentary action, between state and civil society, between private and public, production and consumption, between oral versus televisual communication, between the cultural versus the political.

British communism's creativity of late has been precisely where it challenged its own tradition. But Little Red Riding Hood, who has been bright and brave as she delved deep in the forest, has huffed and puffed and blown the house down. Little Red Riding Hood can't live on critique alone. The last refuge of a communist, a sense of identity, has also disappeared. Party cards aren't passports and parties aren't life and soul. The critique of communism may produce decent communists, but nowhere, no longer, does it produce decent communist parties.

Many communist activists put their renewable energy elsewhere, outside the party, in the informal world of civil society, the practical pains and pleasures of politics that make a difference,

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both in lived life and in the imagination. Nonetheless, they longed to be elsewere, too – in the Political Domain, inside the institutions. Where Labour tends to live in the institutions of the state, Western communists tend to live in the institutions of the movement, often making the fatal mistake of conflating the movement with the people. What that can sometimes mean is that communists are good on tactics and strategy and not so good on deciphering the political moods of the people. The communist tradition of public politicking is typically expressed in the popular front and the cult of 'unity is strength', a cult which lived in dread of difference. The popular front has had its honourable moments, but at worst it relies on the conservative common sense of the lowest common denominator. And it sought typically to centralise control of ready-made constituencies or interests.

By contrast the Labour Party's traditional anxiety about activism, not least because activism may suggest autonomous interests outside the party, is reinforced by the British electoral system, which encourages Labourism's jealous guardianship of its right to represent us all.

More recently, the dominance of ultra-leftism in the Labour Party in the early 1980s prompted the purge by the new leader. Parties, he could argue, are as much about discipline as they are about democracy. And he set about disciplining, as well as democratising, his own party. But trotskyism came to be synonymous with struggle, with any activism, in the minds of the new party managers.

Like all European social-democratic parties, Labour has had to re-make itself. The failure of the recent recruitment campaign suggests that Labour is behaving like, if not actually becoming, a party more in the mould of those European parties, in extremis the Spanish PSOE and the Greek Pasok, which are parties of opinion rather than parties of movement. Clearly, the Labour Party is more akin to the older European mass parties, like the German SPD, the Italian PCI, with strong roots in communities and unions. But all are having to root themselves in new, mobile constituencies, producing politics around issues rather than self-evident interests.

British Labourism has emerged from the turmoil of the 1980s – impressively, it must be said – with a tightly policed party, but also a party mesmerised by one moment – the general election. Everything is subordinated to that project. Problems – like the poll tax – are to be solved by voting Labour.

This is where electoralism becomes absenteeism and inertia. A terror of stepping outside the state institutions, which are the house in which Labourism lives, produces results like that deadly vote but narrow majority (14-13) on Labour's national executive committee opposing participation in a national poll tax demonstration. David Blunkett and Bryan Gould on the party's national executive promoted support and had the tentative backing of their party leader – but Roy Hattersley opposed it. And that was that. The old Right, it seems, sometimes still rules. It is a reminder of the hybrid that is the new model Labour Party with old-style structures, traditions that live on from the past, together with modernisers who are the voices of new times, for sure, with their eyes and ears plugged into the video screens and opinion polls, but who are often alienated from activism, whether it's the poll tax unions or Comic Relief or women's aid.

As a party, Labour still won't take responsibility for mobilising old-fashioned popular fronts, never mind contemporary coalitions of resistance, because it collapses its interests as an autonomous political party with the interests of the state. Home affairs spokesperson Brian Wilson, a bright lad going places, exemplified the confusion when he recently reaffirmed his rebuke to non-payers of the poll tax, by insisting that they'd damage local government. Labour, in its role as the state, can't be doing with Labour in its role as an autonomous party. That's what prompted Hackney council to barricade its town hall and call in police reinforcements before an anti-poll tax demonstration. And according to one anti-poll tax campaigner in the home counties, it's the same attitude which has prompted the Labour council to treat their anti-poll tax unions with rude hostility. 'We tried to encourage councillors not to punish people who don't pay their tax, we tried to do this in a questionnaire. Not one filled it in. They accused us of trying to make trouble, so they banned us from community halls etc. We've been banned from our facilities.'

And here we come to the poll-tax crisis – that vacuum left by the Communist Party and the Labour Party has been filled by the ultra Left, for whom the campaign is subordinate to their self-interest. 'Militant and the SWP stand by our stall with *their* magazines and stuff. We feel it's not fair, but we can't stop them. It's a real struggle to work with them,' says a non-aligned anarchist in a home counties town where several groups are active against the poll tax.

They appropriate the campaign and polarise its politics. And yet the poll tax is the paradigmatic political problem for the whole of the Left. It exposes that old culture of popular frontism, whether defined by Militant, the SWP, Labourism or the CP, as incipiently totalitarian, because it reduces all interests to a single slogan, and subordinates all interests to the good of whichever party pulls off the popular front. By contrast, Greenham on the one hand, and Live Aid and Comic Relief, to take a few exemplars, on the other, succeeded precisely because they were defined by a different discipline – the discipline of service. The movement serviced the issues. They worked because they not only encouraged participation, they encouraged people to select their own priorities and possibilities. At Greenham, you could set up camp, break into the fence, get arrested, go away for the weekend, or you could appropriate the fence by transforming it, or you could simply support by bearing witness. In Comic Relief, you could wear a red nose – even on your radiator. Has a campaign ever taken to the road so successfully? Collect money by running for it, laughing for it, playing music for it. You could participate simply by bearing witness. It exemplified a new politics of spectacle which emerged in the late 80s in which stars took the lead in aligning popular culture to radical and generous politics. In their different ways, the successful movements have both enabled people to do something, and formulated direct action that is worth watching, worth celebrating, that produces pride and pleasure rather than reproducing pain and misery. Don't pay – Don't Collect. Simple slogan. Seems good. If you don't do it, you're bad. However, the campaign against the poll tax calls out for a politics that isn't simple or singular, but which derives from diversity – one that supports the refuseniks, those who can't or won't pay, one that plans how to protect them when their crunch comes, one that marches, petitions, too, one that encourages local authorities to enter into dialogue with community resistance rather than policing it. The biggest category, though, is those who will pay and are very opposed to the tax. In other words, it calls out for a strategy based on differential needs, abilities and dispositions, on coping with conflicts of interest rather than suppressing them.

'Don't Pay – Don't Collect. Simple slogan. Seems good. If you don't do it you're bad'

What we don't need is the fetishism of the single slogan or strategy. Don't pay may not mean much in scores of impoverished working-class communities where not paying is part of their survival strategy. In Kirby, for example, thousands of citizens already can't pay their bills. Non-payment may constitute a radical departure, however, in Basingstoke. Either way, payers and non-payers alike need more than a single slogan or demand to sustain their resistance. But that won't be delivered either by the deferred gratification of a Labour victory at the next general election, or by a popular front politics, that mode of public politicking which deemed unity to be strength and which dreaded the key word of contemporary life – diversity.

If the campaign against the poll tax is to belong to new times, if it is to welcome all those people, millions of them, conservatives, socialists, poor people, affluent people, brave people, timid people, who want to do something about it, then it must exemplify a new culture of solidarity, a culture that abandons the totalitarianism of 'unity is strength'. It needs a culture of co-operation instead of control, and diversity instead of domination.●

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Curtains For The Theatre

Britain's civic theatre is dying, sustained only by subsidy and misplaced civic pride. **Ken Worpole** traces the emergence of a new, dynamic and flexible performance culture which is taking over the streets and the airwaves

The fanfare of trumpets which greeted the opening of the new £14m Leeds Playhouse in February probably marked the end of an era rather than the beginning of something different or new. For in many other places in Britain the civic theatre is in a critical condition: the Leicester Haymarket has a deficit of £531,000, the Liverpool Playhouse is down nearly £400,000 and many others are struggling to survive. The poll tax and charge capping may bring others to the brink of closure. Many theatre critics and arts administrators, while praising the energies and monies invested in the Leeds venture, felt obliged to record that is was likely to be the last of the great monuments to traditional civic culture. For in many places the living theatre has packed its bags and moved on.

Further signs of the difficulties of sustaining a traditional building-based approach to public cultural provision were the recent announcement that the innovative Half Moon theatre company in London was to close as debts caught up with it and the Arts Council's decision to cut any further funding to the long-standing Roundhouse renovation project, intended to be a showcase of black and Asian theatre and performance arts in Britain. Finally, in January, one of the candidates for the post of artistic director of the RSC apparently made it a condition of appointment that the company be allowed to leave the Barbican building, hopefully one of the last great fortresses of contemporary public culture.

So what went wrong? In recent years most public subsidy of the theatre has been spent on buildings rather than playwrights or actors, on administration rather than on developing new audiences, as John Pick convincingly demonstrated in his 1985 study *The Theatre Industry*. Early last year I spent an evening with a playwright friend of mine I hadn't seen for some time. Although his real love was for the live theatre he had prospered by writing for television. But in his city – a conurbation of over half a million people in the Midlands – the main theatre, the pride of the Labour council and subsidised by local and national government funds to the tune of over £1m a year, spent, in his words, '£100,000 a year on the boilers and £5,000 a year on commissioning new plays'.

The old radical slogan of 'A propertyless theatre for a propertyless class' has somehow, in the magnificent journey of collectivist provision, been turned inside out. The contemporary civic theatre is now beset with problems of real estate, debt charges and leaking roofs rather than the ideological agonies of naturalism, realism or agitprop. Increasingly the publicly-funded theatre seems locked behind doors, entombed in ungainly buildings, immured behind concrete and municipal glass. The civic theatre, the spirit of the times of the postwar age of cultural settlement, is now landlocked, beached by the tides of cultural fragmentation and aesthetic pluralism. The crowds swirl around it daily, but few go in.

In many towns and cities in Britain in the past, spending on the arts amounted to little more than the upkeep of a civic hall or theatre. No arrangements were made to set up or fund venues for dance, jazz and pop music, low-tech production facilities for film, video and recorded music, publishing, photography and many of the other cultural forms which have gained prominence and broken down cultural barriers in recent decades. Until recently, Coventry council didn't even have a full-time arts officer, though it employed over 100 staff at the Belgrade Theatre. Developments such as the Towngate Theatre in Basildon and The Hawth in Crawley have embodied space for other art forms, though the buildings are still dominated by a main auditorium primarily for large-scale theatre and concert performances.

The classic economic bind that much cultural funding has got itself into is in supporting an inordinately high proportion of fixed costs in buildings, maintenance staff and administration. This leaves little available to spend on the variables, such as the actual programmes, exhibitions, performances and artists' fees. Of the national Arts Council drama budget, £10.5m is spent on building-based companies, £2.6m on touring companies and just £0.2m for theatre writing schemes – the development of new work. In dance there is a similar pattern: 13 companies get between them £10.5m, of which the Royal Ballet at the Royal Opera House gets £6.6m, 'New Dance' gets just £0.1m, 'Dance For Ethnic Minorities' and 'Dance Development' each get £0.1m. The dead weight of the old repertoire weighs heavily on the shoulders of the new. By contrast, in other cultural forms – cinema, radio, television, popular music – developing new ideas and material is what artistic policy is all about.

The centralisation of resources has also had an effect. The 1986 Cork Re-

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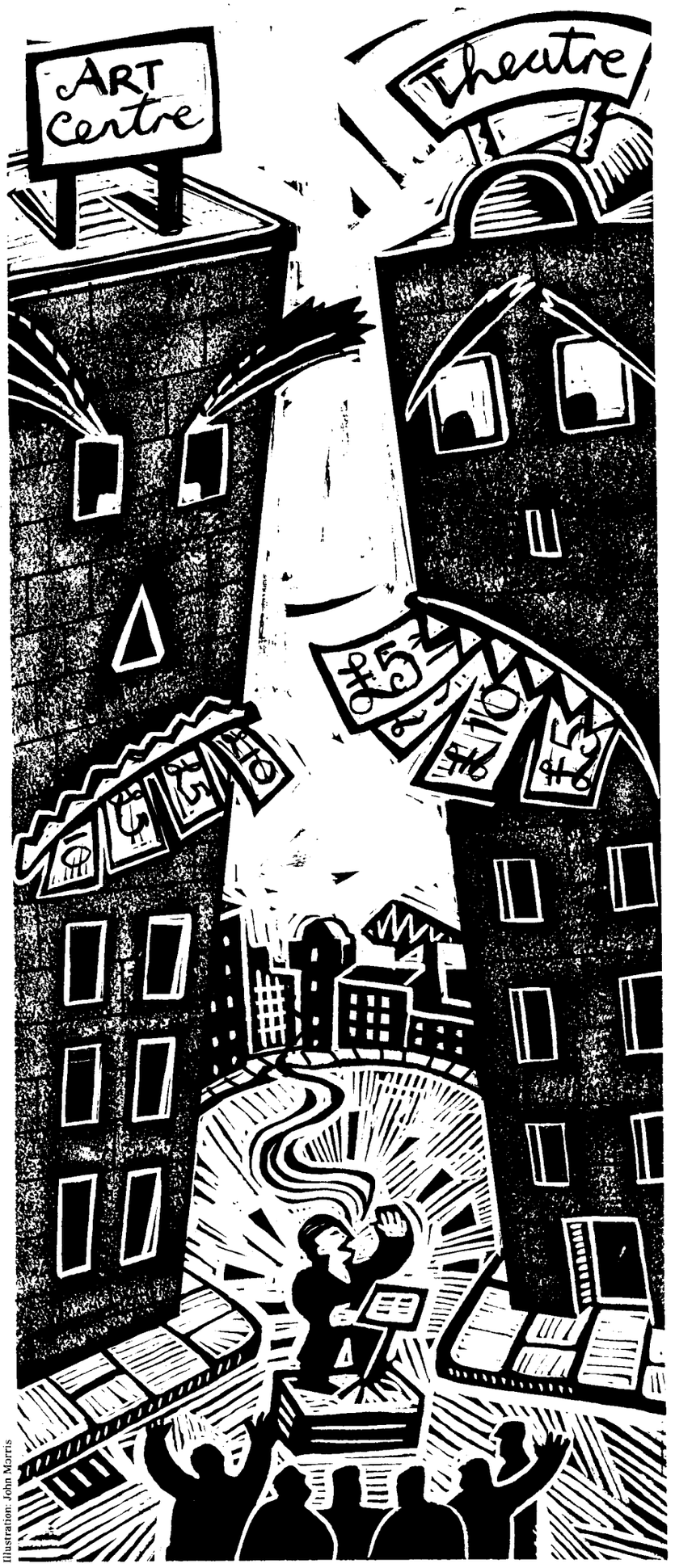

Illustration: John Morris

port, 'Theatre Is For All', found that between them the National Theatre and the RSC had systematically increased their share of the total national budget for drama (from 30% in 1970/71 to 47% in 1985/86), that Arts Council support for small-scale experimental work had decreased (from 60% in 1977/78 to 49% in 1985/86) and that support for touring theatre had decreased. It concluded pessimistically that, 'It is hard to escape the conclusion that the seedbed of theatrical development in England is neglected and dying.'

Today there are fewer and fewer radical or innovative touring companies around who can fill a 500-plus seat auditorium outside London even for a short run of three days, let alone a week or a fortnight. Theatre as a form of political mobilisation – entertaining and rallying the troops, Roland Muldoon used to call it – is not in tune with the current political or cultural mood, which is struggling to work through diversity and pluralism. Pub theatre is by definition more exploratory, more reflective, more domestic and intense. Cabaret and performance art encourage us to mock our own pretensions. These forms problematise politics rather than seeking to rally audiences for that one last battle.

'Much of the subsidy is going to keep ageing racist comedians and blow-dried 50s' pop musicians on the road rather than underwriting the discovery of new talent'

Instead of being able to programme only drama the managers of many 'receiving' theatres often have to try to balance an unhappy combination of O-level Shakespeare, amateur productions of Gilbert and Sullivan, professional touring work by companies such as Temba, Hull Truck, Shared Experience, Red Shift or Cheek By Jowl, with a very heavy ballast of Care Bears Show, Bobby Davro and Des O'Connor. The result is often a complete lack of cultural focus or sense of audience. What is more, the public-sector network of subsidised theatres is the only thing that keeps a dying commercial entertainment sector just about on its feet. Let the dead bury the dead. For much of the subsidy is going to keep ageing racist comedians and blow-dried 50s' pop musicians on the road rather than underwriting the discovery of new talent, or sustaining an avant-garde or the right of innovative theatre to fail.

There is nothing wrong with 50s' English pop or Bobby Davro, but they surely shouldn't be the main cultural forms that local public subsidy is supporting. Investment in a local recording studio or a regional publishing house would be of at least equal merit. A fringe theatre festival or local network of informal theatre and performance venues would be a better option. Hearing Ornette Coleman or Kathryn Tickell in the intimacy of a club or at the Barbican or London Arena are very different experiences. For many people who enjoy live performance – dance, jazz, theatre, cabaret – small is still beautiful.

In national rather than local terms, the Arts Council spends some £27.6m a year on drama, £24.3m on music (primarily

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opera), £11.4m on dance and mime, £2.3m on the visual arts, £0.7m on film, video and broadcasting and a mere £0.5m on literature. These varying sums hardly reflect the priorities of cultural policy as we near the end of the 20th century. Broadcasting and literature, and most certainly popular music, for example, have in recent times more acutely reflected the challenges and tensions of the diverse multi-cultural society we now live in. Artists such as Salman Rushdie, Liz Lochhead, Hanif Kureishi, Neneh Cherry, John Lydon and Steve Williamson have been among the most articulate and expressive visionaries of recent years. They are transforming the traditional 'English' literary and musical repertoire in as powerful a way as modernism transformed European bourgeois culture at the beginning of the 20th century.

'Putting up buildings designed expressly for an event that may happen only twice a year is hardly radical planning'

But it is not just the civic theatre that faces problems of retreat and potential dissolution. The whole issue of what constitutes a 'civic culture' needs radical rethinking. For the model that has served us well for nearly 150 years – going back to the Museums Act of 1845 and the Public Libraries Act of 1850 which encouraged the local municipal provision of museums and libraries – has in recent years begun to crumble from within. The great era of civic provision, which in many towns meant a neo-classical town hall to which a museum, public art gallery and central library were adjoined, is being recast as policies of de-centralisation, outreach and a recognition of new cultural forms challenge the authority of a building-based culture.

The ethos of traditional civic culture was based on what has been called 'the distribution theory of culture': that public cultural policy was best achieved by distributing the national (and often imperial) culture to the emergent classes eager for education and enlightenment. This gave rise to the lending libraries of approved works. Even I can remember when Joyce's *Ulysses* was available only by special request at Southend Central Library in the early 1960s. The museum collections of imperial exotica, native baubles, photographs of white men bringing civilisation to foreign lands, stuffed parrots and collections of locally-found Roman coins are all products of this tradition. Only the art galleries sometimes contained works by local artists – watercolours of local scenes – rather than a further helping of the national diet.

In general, civic culture did not include the notion of local or indigenous cultural production. The libraries did not see it as their function to encourage local writers or to enter publishing themselves. The museums often turned their backs on the living cultures within which they operated. When the civic theatre emerged its programme was essentially the 'national' repertoire: Shakespeare, Beaumont and Fletcher, Congreve, Shaw, Wilde, Noel Coward, Terence Rattigan, Wesker, Pinter, Ayckbourn, to which was added the European classical tradition. The initial impulse of the repertory movement which emerged in Birmingham and Liverpool at the beginning of the century, to create a regional drama based on local writing, conspicuously failed.

Public subsidy was a proper ingredient of civic culture, but essentially it was the subsidy of buildings rather than performances, of symbolic cultural spaces rather than of artefacts or artists. It is no wonder that today, in an economy which derives much of its momentum from inflated land values and property speculation, a building-based approach to cultural policy produces enormous stresses on local-government finance. Town councils are struggling to subsidise arts and leisure centres located on town-centre sites when retailers and office-builders are prepared to pay £50 a square foot.

Some administrators and politicians argue that the reason for continuing to build large concert halls, theatres and art centres is to attract the 'national' theatre, dance companies and orchestras to perform in their towns and cities; to bring 'the best' to local audiences. If this still is the case, portable venues could be set up just for the occasion and taken down and used somewhere else afterwards. The technology of portable buildings is now so advanced as to be able to meet most if not all artistic, comfort-of-audience and safety needs. The Bubble Theatre have been doing it for years, as has the Zap Club 'Elephant Tent' at the Edinburgh Festival.

In Europe, portable structures are used much more for festivals and big events. Putting up buildings designed expressly for an event that may happen only twice a year is hardly radical planning. It makes no more sense than building a new motorway in order to cope with the crush of Christmas shopping or an FA Cup tie. But a large capital building project looks good on an ambitious local government officer's CV, and that can occasionally be one of the less rational impulses for thinking big.

In an era of extraordinary cultural innovation and change (and it is going to get even more frenetic, not less), flexibility and adaptability should be the key principles of cultural policy. It is clear that what both artists and audiences want is flexibility in creating meeting places for ideas and performances. Artists no longer stay in one place or within one discipline; people move from rock music to dance to performance art and back again within the same week; actors move from cabaret to television commercials to experimental theatre in the same day. The amateur/professional divide is breaking down as performance poets and musicians go from street busking one day to the television studio the next.

One can already see this need for greater flexibility in the growth over the past decade of pub theatre, now one of the most exciting developments in contemporary drama, much of it taking its cue form the success of the fringe at the Edinburgh Festival. London is now threaded with a large number of pub venues regularly producing new work, translations, or innovative productions from the traditional repertoire. There are similar networks in Edinburgh, Glasgow, Newcastle and Birmingham and developing elsewhere. If you had wanted to see a Vaclav Havel play in London in the last 12 months you would have gone to the Old Red Lion, the Soho Poly or the Lyric Theatre in Hammersmith rather than to the West End or 'national' stages. Only the fringe theatres seem able to respond to the urgency and immediacy of contemporary political theatre.

The recent jazz renaissance in Britain cannot be separated off from the proliferation of small venues. Wine bars, pubs, community centres, fringe theatre, dance clubs and even deconsecrated churches have afforded musicians time, money and regular opportunities for developing their work in numerous combinations of line-up and changing ensembles. 'Jazz At The Town Hall' no longer has the same appeal. The number of venues regularly programming jazz in London has grown from 70 to 350 in the last five years, most of them outside the 'civic' circuit.

In recent years most other civic institutions have undergone dramatic transformations: the Town Hall is being decentralised; the public library is going on-line; the walls of the civic art gallery and museum have been breached by the growth of public art, environmental art, open-air museums and educational outreach. It is time too that the civic theatre or concert hall in Britain renewed itself, if it is not to suffer the fate of the great music halls of the 1890s or the film palaces of the 1930s whose audiences moved on; bulldozed to the ground to make way for shopping centres, or converted into carpet warehouses or indoor antique malls.

In the end there are only two ways to defend a fortress. One is to surround it with out-houses, buildings which mediate between it and the everyday world – and this has in some places happened with outreach work, theatre-in-education teams, networking with educational and other local and regional institutions. The other is by vacating it and disappearing into the countryside or going underground. In post-modern society cultural transformation takes place on the streets, on the airwaves, in the ebb and flow of subcultures and networks, through fanzines and samizdat, on the dance floor and in the alternative cabaret venue above the high-street pub. The theatre started on the streets, on makeshift platforms erected by the Guilds for local festivals. It is re-establishing that connection. Let the walls come tumbling down.●

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MAYFEST

The Rivals

As the European city of culture for 1990, Scotland's second city is stealing the limelight from the picturesque capital. **Sarah Villiers** finds that there is a lot more than 42 miles that keeps Edinburgh and Glasgow apart

Although geographically very close and sharing a tenacious Caledonian pride, no two British cities could be further apart in terms of history and character than Glasgow and Edinburgh. The 42 miles of motorway between them represent a cultural chasm that is not easily negotiated. Edinburgh, with its legacy of light industry, presbyterian leanings and intellectual prestige, is regarded as the genteel, vaguely aristocratic neighbour of its commercial cousin. Glasgow, home of the rich tobacco barons, once-great Clyde shipyards and locomotive manufacturers, is a cultural hotch-potch whose inhabitants have been variously characterised as cheery salt-of-the-earth types or stab-in-the-back drunken thugs.

Myth-makers have proposed a dichotomy between a nose-in-the-air bourgeoisie and a down-to-earth proletariat. But the natives of the cities are often the first to confirm the stereoptypical divisions. These divisions are simple insofar as they are usually obvious, yet complex insofar as they are so very deeply rooted.

Glaswegians, railing under the demeaning label 'second city', tend to be the most passionate in their dislike of their compatriots, although the refined citizens of 'Auld Reekie' are never loathe to join the fracas. In 1985, when Glasgow's Lord Provost's car broke down in the capital, a crowd gathered and cheered at his dilemma.

This month's Mayfest is the eighth annual festival in Glasgow; it is now the second biggest international festival in the UK. It's no mere co-incidence that Scotland's two most important cities are hosts to Britain's top arty bashes for, alongside other factors, a lurking spirit of competition has fired Mayfest's meteoric rise to prominence.

The flourishing of Mayfest has been part of a number of dynamic changes that Glasgow has undergone in recent years. As the city has sought ways to compensate for its crippled industries, both Glasgow and Edinburgh have been chasing the tourist dollar with increasing enthusiasm. The picturesque capital has obvious charms. Glasgow on the other hand has become expert at publicising what it has to offer, pitching itself as 'gateway to the highlands' for travellers in an attempt to woo them west. The battle has become heated in the last decade.

Glasgow scored a triumph in 1983 when advertising consultant, John Struthers, coined the phrase 'Glasgow's Miles Better'. Accompanied by a grinning yellow misterman, the slogan was symbolic of Glasgow's rejuvenation. It bore testimony to the clean-up campaign which had been effective both metaphorically, regarding its image, and physically, with a flurry of tree-planting and stone-cleaning which transformed the grimy city centre.

In paranoid fashion, Edinburgh citizens took the 'Miles Better' statement personally, detecting a snide allusion to their own fair city. The logo, which appeared on hoardings and buses throughout Britain, was banned by a prickly Lothian Region who regarded it as an affront to the capital. Edinburgh buses would certainly not extol the virtues of Glasgow. At the time, it was mooted that Edinburgh should adopt the motto 'Edinburgh's Slightly Superior', a suggestion which spoke volumes about the city's self-image.

The second blow came a few years later when Glasgow's newly-opened Burrell Collection at Pollock Park knocked Edinburgh Castle from its undisputed perch as 'top Scottish tourist attraction'. Acclaim for the city was further consolidated in 1988 when the Garden Festival attracted over 4m visitors. Horticulture gave way to culture when Glasgow delivered its final blow. Catching Edinburgh with its tartan breeks down, it roundly trounced it in the nominations for European 'city of culture' 1990.

Smug and confident, the capital had rested on its artistic laurels and merely proclaimed its reputation for fudge, shopping and shortbread in its 1986 submission. Glasgow put forward a far more vigorous case. In a co-operative proposal from civic arts, tourist, leisure and business sectors, it trashed its dated image and pointed out that it was home to Scottish Opera, Scottish Ballet, the Scottish National Orchestra and boasted a wealth of theatres, galleries and cinemas. The combined attendance of these institutions and centres of the arts totalled more than those who passed through the turnstiles of the city's Rangers and Celtic football clubs. Glasgow had spent more than £1 billion in the first half of the decade developing the arts. Its assertion that it could raise the necessary finance clinched the nomination.

The government was recommending a city which had banished all Tory MPs and had a scant number of Tory councillors. Nonetheless, an aghast Lord Provost in Edinburgh claimed that it was a vindictive political decision against the capital, punishing it because its own council had recently switched to Labour control. There was disquiet elsewhere, too. *The Scotsman*'s diarist delivered a diatribe: 'to compare what Glasgow has with Edinburgh, where culture and informed criticism reaches back as far as the murder of Rizzio and maybe beyond, where every battlement, cobbled street, lamp-standard and municipal dustbin speaks a culture light years beyond Glasgow's comparatively dim understanding of the word, is to compare, in my essentially biased view, Hyperion to a satyr.'

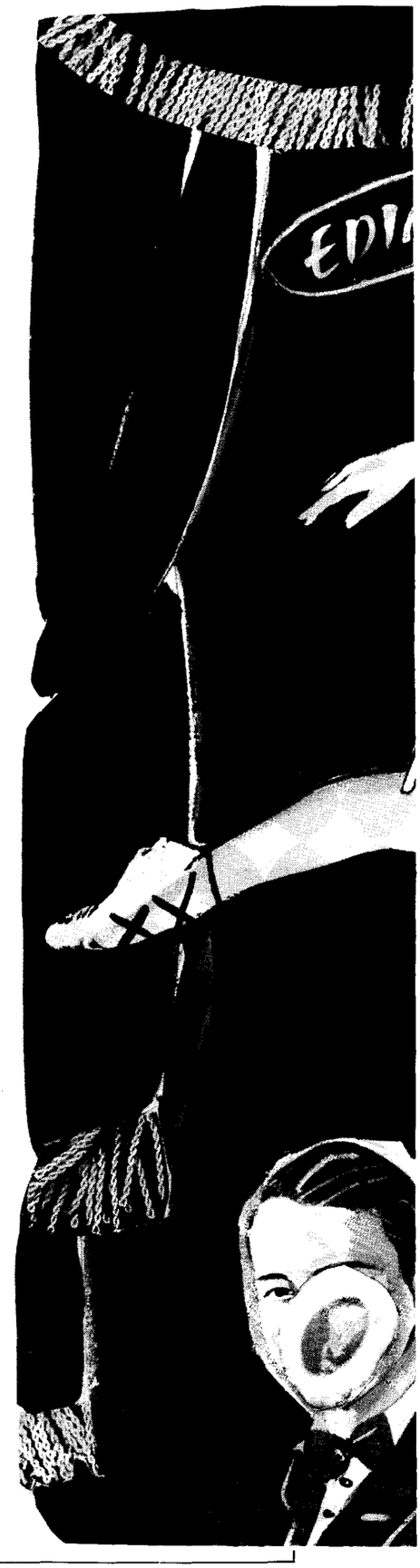

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Illustration: Beverly Levy

Out Of Glasgow
Sauchiehall Street
The Herald
James Kelman
Sheena Easton
Tutti Frutti
Kenny Dalglish
Lulu
The Bay City Rollers
Easterhouse
Andrew Neil
Benny Lynch
The Burrell Collection
Taggart
Wet Wet Wet
The Queen Elizabeth
Keir Hardie
The Citizens Theatre
Charles Rennie Mackintosh

Out Of Edinburgh
Robert Louis Stevenson
Burke and Hare
Princes Street
The Traverse Theatre
Miss Jean Brodie
Ron Brown
Encyclopedia Britannica
James Watt
The Scotsman
The Tattoo
David Hume
Torness
Muriel Gray
Greyfriars' Bobby
Hearts and Hibernian
Sean Connery
Selina Scott
Alexander Fleming

The announcement was a catalyst for latent jealousies on both sides. Maxwell's *Daily Record*, a Scottish tabloid based on Glasgow's Clyde, sniped: 'For all its posturing and preening at Festival time, Edinburgh is no more than a down-at-heel toff with egg on its face.' Such insults are at the heart of the city's consciousness and are as likely to be picked up in the press as in the pub.

Glasgow's success had a lot to do with marketing techniques picked up from North America. With its grid-like street structure, it is often noted that Glasgow resembles an American city. The American influences are not only visible in Glasgow's bars, shopping malls and cinema multiplexes. They also pervade the Glasgow psyche, particularly the character of the Glasgow male. He may have downed his flick-knife but he's still in love with Hollywood machismo, all sneer and swagger.

A North American immodesty also characterises Glaswegians, who have never been slow to sing their own praises – often literally with sentimental homages like *Mother Glasgow* and *Glasgow Belongs To Me*. They excel at self-publicity and their aggressive optimism is increasingly paying off. In the midst of the gleeful celebrations over the 'culture city' award, one council PR officer noted: 'I doubt very much if the meek will ever inherit the earth – and if they did I would be interested to see how long they would keep it.'

Edinburgh, with its scenic vistas, wide sweeping streets and cobbled alleyways, neoclassical architecture and cosmopolitan flow, is often tagged 'the Athens of the north'. It is a city very much in the European tradition. But also a city ill-at-ease with itself. It has a higher proportion of public-school educated citizens than any other city in the UK but also boasts housing estates like Craigmiller which can compete with the worst of London's inner-city areas. In fact, it supercedes them when it comes to heroin abuse and Aids. The calm, middle-class facade obscures the fact that it is essentially a very working-class city. But, unlike Glasgow, its citizens prefer the art of understatement; in 1970 one commented characteristically, 'I quite liked the festival, I even enjoyed it. All in all we are none the worse for it.'

Glasgow's recent achievements point to one strong irony. It is traditionally a staunch socialist stronghold and the council rides high on rhetoric, but there probably isn't a civic authority in the country which has responded more stridently to the entrepreneurial ethos of the 80s. Emulating one of Thatcher's ploys, they even gave the 1990 publicity contract to Saatchi and Saatchi. They came up with a slogan which left most Glaswegians gasping in disbelief and derision.

'There's A Lot Glasgowing On!' scoffed Robbie Coltrane, adding more accurately, 'More like "A Lot Of Edinbuggering!" '●

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Ruth Wishart has a proud Glaswegian eye on the Mayfests of the future

Festival Fever

Mayfest dancers: Glasgow forks out more for its festivals

When an assortment of British cities made their pitch to represent the UK as the 'cultural capital' of Europe for 1990, Glasgow assembled its arts mafia. Already an informal talking shop, the men and women who run the galleries, theatres, festivals and arts projects in the city represented a wide spectrum of creative interest.

Backing them was a Labour-controlled district council which had already been instrumental in launching Mayfest, the annual arts festival which is run on a smaller scale than the Edinburgh extravaganza in August. Despite the combined force of diverse cultural interests and experience, when the Office of Arts and Libraries made its state visit to hear Glasgow's case it remained unconvinced. Would anybody really take Glasgow seriously?

Glasgow had a rethink. It produced a document proving that, directly and indirectly, some £24m went annually into arts funding in the city. It went on to win the nomination. The events of 1990 have provoked a powerful debate within the city. For some, the £40m which will be pumped into the year's programme, almost half of it from council coffers, represents the supreme irrelevance in a city still scarred by inadequate postwar housing schemes and pockets of desperately high unemployment. For others, 1990 represents the key to the future, the acknowledgement that Glasgow faces a post-industrial adjustment and must play to new strengths.

A specially commissioned survey, 'The Economic Impact Of The Arts In Glasgow', underlines the central role arts-based tourism now plays in creating jobs. It also has the vital effect of providing the environment which makes the city an attractive proposition for inward investors and London-based firms relocating their personnel.

The radical regeneration of the city centre in Glasgow, dismissed in some quarters as yuppification, has also been a central part of this strategy. An instructive contrast is with Liverpool, which shares a similar ethnic mix but whose city centre, the impressive docklands development notwithstanding, still bears the scars of neglect.

Whatever else 1990 will leave its citizens in Glasgow, they are assured some physical bequests. There is the new concert hall to be opened in October, a major new gallery and theatre space carved from the arched ruins underneath Central Station, a refurbished McLellan Galleries and an exciting theatre space at the Tramway, the site of the old transport museum. Already the latter has hosted such diverse productions as Peter Brook's *Mahabharata* and John McGrath's *Border Warfare*.

For established events such as Mayfest, now in its eighth year, 1990 has provided a blessing of the decidedly mixed variety. While arts sponsorship has been buoyant, the donors of corporate largesse have been more than a little spoilt for choice. Eighty thousand pounds, which should have gone to Mayfest from a brewery, for instance, found itself a new home with an item on the 1990 cultural menu.

On the brighter side, both district and regional councils, which have sponsored Mayfest since its inception, have increased their commitment. Glasgow district has increased its funding by £100,000 to £400,000 and Strathclyde has increased its core funding to £110,000. Strathclyde has also put a further £100,000 into one of this year's centrepieces, 'Art From The Frontline States'. Almost a festival within a festival, it will feature film, music, literature and drama from Angola, Botswana, Mozambique and Zimbabwe plus a major exhibition in the city's main gallery in Kelvingrove.

While Africa provides the main focus in foreign work this May, there are also substantial contributions from Eire, the USA and the Soviet Republic of Georgia. However glittering the component parts from abroad, one of the basic building blocks of Mayfest has always been its community programme. This has had two strands. Local community theatre groups have had the opportunity both to work with national companies like Scottish Ballet and Scottish Opera and to have their work performed in city-centre venues.

The other part of this cross-fertilisation of the local with the national and international has been a community tour of imported music and drama to venues from housing schemes to old people's homes. That commitment persists, strengthened by local-authority funding specifically targeted on that aspect of the Mayfest programme. As a result, in addition to a plethora of local productions, Zimbabwe's Amakhosi Theatre, the music from the front-line states and Belfast's much acclaimed Charabanc company will all play community venues.

Recently, a major sponsor suggested that he would find Mayfest a more attractive option for his kitty were it to slim down the community programme and remodel itself as a festival of international arts which featured only the major and established Scottish companies. Setting aside the wholesale hostility to any such notion from the keepers of the public purse, his suggestion misses the central point that all festivals reflect their roots and the cities which give birth to them. The Mayfest's surest route to disaster would be to try and be Edinburgh writ smaller. That costume would fit neither the city nor its inhabitants.

The same, of course, applies in some sense to the reverse proposition. Nevertheless, Edinburgh Festival

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director Frank Dunlop has for the last three years been attempting to shrug off charges of elitism and inaccessibility by shoring up the parts of his organisation which seek to make Edinburgh's wares attractive citywide.

Some points of that fine tuning have been more successful than others. An attempt to put a multi-purpose entertainment dome in a public park in a peripheral housing scheme excited a relatively small amount of interest and generated a rather large amount of debt. On the other hand, adjusting the ticket prices for some performances and making the Leith Theatre an annual venue for popular folk opera has been an undoubted success.

Perhaps one of the differences of approach lies in the fact that in Glasgow Labour are the political establishment and are therefore relaxed about doing deals involving private and public investment partnerships. Edinburgh, meanwhile, has only just got used to the fact that Labour now runs the capital, one of Scotland's dourest outposts.

The future for both festivals seems secure. Edinburgh has now sufficiently improved relationships with its district council to rely on rolling three-year funding, and its regional council in Lothian has finally begun to put some money into the arts.

In Glasgow, this year's Mayfest director, Bill Burdett-Coutts, shares the same headache as Bob Palmer, director of the festival unit and the man who has somehow to co-ordinate and shape some 2,500 1990 events involving hundreds of amateur impresarios as well as the major Scottish companies, which, incidentally, are now all based in Glasgow.

Their dilemma is how to ensure that, while this year provides an acceptable showcase for a hugely increased number of visitors, there is no discernible hangover on January 1, 1991. Bill Burdett-Coutts is acutely aware that his 1991 Mayfest programme must be at least as vital as this year's. While over at the city chambers, the first question Palmer's team asked project leaders in search of funding was, 'How will your event benefit the city in the next few years?'

In the meantime, Glasgow suffers from a surfeit of hype and a surfeit of journalists crawling over its buildings, examining its pretensions and trying to unravel the conundrum of the cultural capital of Europe being a city where once even the buses travelled in pairs.

They are not aided much in this quest by the natives who, while routinely abusive about their home town in private, prove almost wholly chauvinistic to visiting scribes. One writer sought to explain his difficulties by suggesting that in Glasgow, 'there is a formidable if sometimes ill-founded kind of sub-nationalism'. He's right. And I'm not knocking it.●

Rob Prince pieces together a musical jigsaw

Frontline Fusion

The flowering of a home-based music culture, based on traditional music forms and rhythms but employing the electric paraphernalia of modern rock 'n' soul, has been a familiar process across Africa as colonial shackles have been cast off. But nowhere has this evolution occurred within quite such a revolutionary context as in the frontline states of southern Africa. Mayfest audiences will have the chance to gauge the stage of evolution of this process in 'Arts From The Frontline States', which is one of the international centrepieces of this year's festival.

In Africa music typically plays an important social role; offering advice and warnings on matters of everyday import. But in the frontline states, and notably in Zimbabwe, Angola and Mozambique, it has also played a central role in raising and sustaining a revolutionary political awareness among the population.

In Zimbabwe, Thomas Mapfumo, who was jailed during the Smith era as a 'subversive element', created his 'chimurenga' (struggle) music. He drew on the mystical 'mbira' (thumb piano) tradition of the Shona people, which has strong military connotations, and fused it with elements of Western guitar rock and black American soul. Later, through the massive influence of Bob Marley, reggae also entered the mix. Mapfumo set the pattern and innumerable other bands, such as The Bhundu Boys, The Four Brothers and John Chibadura, followed suit. These days, for fans of unpretentious, bar-band guitar music, Harare, and much of Zimbabwe, is a kind of heaven.

Within Zimbabwe, the influence of modern Zairean music, which owes much to Latin American influences, has waned as Zimbabwe's own musical identity has evolved. Zambia, however, which is closer to Zaire geographically, remains poised somewhere between the fluid guitar and Latin-derived rhythms of Zairean 'rumba' and 'soukous', and the basic two guitar, bass and drums line-up favoured in Zimbabwe. This basic line-up is adapted to local rhythms and local guitar styles.

There are exceptions. Amayenge's furious, percussion-based guitar and vocal thrash, for example, has earned the group a special status on the John Peel show. But on the whole, the Zambian sound, typified by groups like Masasu Band and Shalawambe, is sweeter, gentler and less urgent than its Zimbabwean counterpart, less redolent, perhaps, of music that was made to go hand-in-hand with a machine gun.

Lyrically, however, Zambia's one-party status allows for little of the political freedom enjoyed in Zimbabwe. Whether political protest like Thomas Mapfumo's latest, highly-acclaimed album, *Corruption*, would be tolerated in Zambia is a moot point. Whether it would be tolerated inside Zimbabwe once Mugabe achieves his goal of one-party orthodoxy is even mooter.

Of Mozambique, Botswana, Angola and the newly independent Namibia, little has so far been heard musically in the UK. Angola's Kafala Brothers toured here last year and released an album. But, haunting though their acoustic songs about love and revolution may be, their sound owes more to the 'nueva trova' folk movement of Latin America than to local music styles.

The release last year in the UK of a lively if uneven album from Mozambique's exuberant, Latin-influenced Orchestra Marrabenta also offered a tantalising taste of the kind of sound that helps keep revolutionary spirits high on the eastern seaboard.

From Botswana, whose major musical claim to fame outside Africa seems to be as the location for Hugh Masekela's mobile studio during the recording of his 1983 album, *Technobush*, virtually nothing has been heard musically in the UK. The performance at Mayfest by one of Botswana's leading modern musicians, Banjo Mosele, who played rhythm guitar on *Technobush*, will prove particularly fascinating. It is one more fragment of a complex musical jigsaw puzzle, which, like the geopolitics of the entire frontline area, is in a state of rapid (r)evolution. Catch it while you can.●

Thomas Mapfumo

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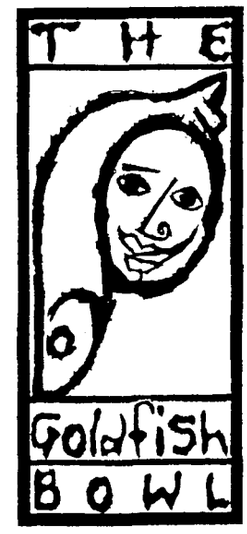

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Amanda Lipman examines the fate of heroines who hate

Heroine Abuse

The bets are already on as to how the cinema of the 90s will replace the emotionally unfulfilled, successful career woman of the late-80s; the Sigourney Weavers, Debra Wingers, Melanie Griffiths and Holly Hunters, for whom femininity was about wriggling in and out of business suits while juggling relationships and traditional women's concerns. And all with as much style as possible.

Even this early in the decade, there have been some unusual angles on the feminine mystique. The schizophrenic simian, Ella, in George A Romero's *Monkey Shines*; the dumpy secretary, Colette, for whom a man leaves his beautiful wife in Bertrand Blier's *Trop Belle Pour Toi!* and now, Roseanne Barr's Ruth, the she-devil of Susan Seidelman's latest movie.

Ruth is unattractive and Ruth is angry. Two unexpected premises for a heroine. Mary Fisher (Meryl Streep) is a pretty, fey romantic novelist who is having an affair with Ruth's husband. When Ruth decides to take revenge on her husband and on Mary, it's Ruth we root for.

Hatred is a strangely oblique emotion in the cinema, particularly for women who hate men. They are punished and not forgiven because forgiveness is, of course, a feminine virtue. Ruth is granted the luxury of hatred. But instead of allowing her full vituperation director Seidelman turns Fay Weldon's savage novel, on which the film is based, into a feminist morality tale; one that's too predictable to be satisfying.

Ruth walks out on her cheating husband, burns down their home and leaves the children with him and Mary Fisher. In the film, she goes off to launch her own career, find vengeance and help other underrated women make something of themselves in the job market. 'I've always thought that women like us should stick together,' she says to her equally plain partner. The message is that she-devils are only the product of male fears about women and that if women 'stick together', they'll achieve their goals.

Shock, horror, hatred: The she-devil shares a drink with her rival

If there's a film *She-Devil* resembles it's the early-60s' *Carry On Cabby*. Hattie Jacques, tired of cabby hubby, Sid James' lack of attention towards her, gets revenge by setting up her own rival cab firm of svelte female drivers and nearly puts him out of business. Unlike Hattie Jacques' character, Ruth doesn't go back to her husband for a forgiving final sequence. But she does become more traditionally acceptable as she grows more powerful. She loses her mole, her moustache, her frizzy locks and her appalling dress sense. The 90s' she-devil almost turns into the 80s' heroine. Like the ads used to say, 'Underneath, they're all lovable.'

Compare that with *Trop Belle Pour Toi!* where plain Colette and stunning Florence fight over Gerard Depardieu, the hapless male. A complicated mix of real episodes and triangular fantasies seen from a male viewpoint, the film is, for director Blier, generous towards its female protagonists.

The women plot and scheme for their own well-being because that's the only expression they're allowed. They are too constrained by the film's rigid structure to indulge in long-term hatred. Instead they grow stronger and Depardieu's character retreats into passivity. Through his confused gaze, the film ruminates that, under their loveability, women are deeply disturbing.

She-Devil's truisms stop short of the terrain charted by Weldon's original novel. Banished from the film are Ruth's many and unusual sexual encounters which help her achieve her vengeance. Banished too is the extraordinary finale in which Ruth, unrepentant, undergoes plastic surgery to make her look like Mary Fisher while the real Ms Fisher lies dying and penniless at her hands. Instead of denying the reality of the she-devil, the novel pushes the reader step-by-step through her fiendish 'magic' with genuine glee.

Not surprisingly, it has taken an exploitation director and a horror director to explore this possibility in film. Abel Ferrara's minor masterpiece of 1981, *Ms 45: Angel Of Vengeance*, followed a mute seamstress through a horrifying catalogue of revenge murders after she was raped. More recently, zombie king Romero's *Monkey Shines* turned Ella into a bizarre femme fatale, a beautiful, bright but dangerous monkey dominating a paralysed (and therefore emasculated) man.

She is driven to kill by injections of human brain tissue serum. But even when Ella is at her most vicious, she has the charm of a latter-day Jane Greer, Barbara Stanwyck or Rita Hayworth. Like all those femmes fatales, however, and like Ms 45, she ultimately becomes another femme fatality.

Even with the directors on their side, women can't have it both ways. This makes it all the sadder that Seidelman didn't make that leap and take on the dangerous spirit of Weldon's novel instead of just playing with the devil by shining the odd red light through Ruth's eyes or enveloping her in flames. Some serious hatred would have been truly radical.●

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Nicholas Harman looks behind the powerful myth that stokes the Dunkirk spirit

Glorious Defeat

'As long as the English tongue survives, the word Dunkerque will be spoken with reverence.' Thus the *New York Times* of June 1, 1940, welcomed the name of a dingy French port into the language. On that day the British army in France was scurrying thence across the Channel in disorganised squalor. Yet the British people refused to admit they were beaten.

They transformed their defeat into a glorious myth that carried them through five years of world war, to end up on the winning side. The name of Dunkirk became a patriotic slogan, signifying refusal to admit failure, dogged improvisation, and eventual triumph. Still today, put Britain's union leaders, people in business, parsons, politicians of all parties, to the wall and they will invoke Dunkirk. It is fixed in the people's culture. Everybody knows what it means. But the meaning bears little relationship to what happened in the spring of 1940.

On June 4, 1940, the new prime minister, Winston Churchill, warned the House of Commons not to glorify Dunkirk: 'We must be very careful not to assign to this deliverance the attributes of a victory. Wars are not won by evacuations.' He swore, in words whose power has been obscured by tedious imitation, to fight on the beaches and the landing-grounds, in the fields and the streets and the hilis; and promised victory when 'the New World, with all its power and might, steps forth to the rescue and the liberation of the old'.

To put it bluntly, which Churchill carefully didn't, the new leader was telling his people to hang on until the Americans got them out of the mess. With the Royal Navy and the RAF almost intact, the British were safe for a year from an invasion across the Channel. They were ready to fight on, but had nothing to fight with. The escape from France had brought home some 200,000 soldiers, but without their artillery, their vehicles and their pathetically few tanks. So they made words into weapons, to foster the faith that they would eventually triumph and to rally support around the world.

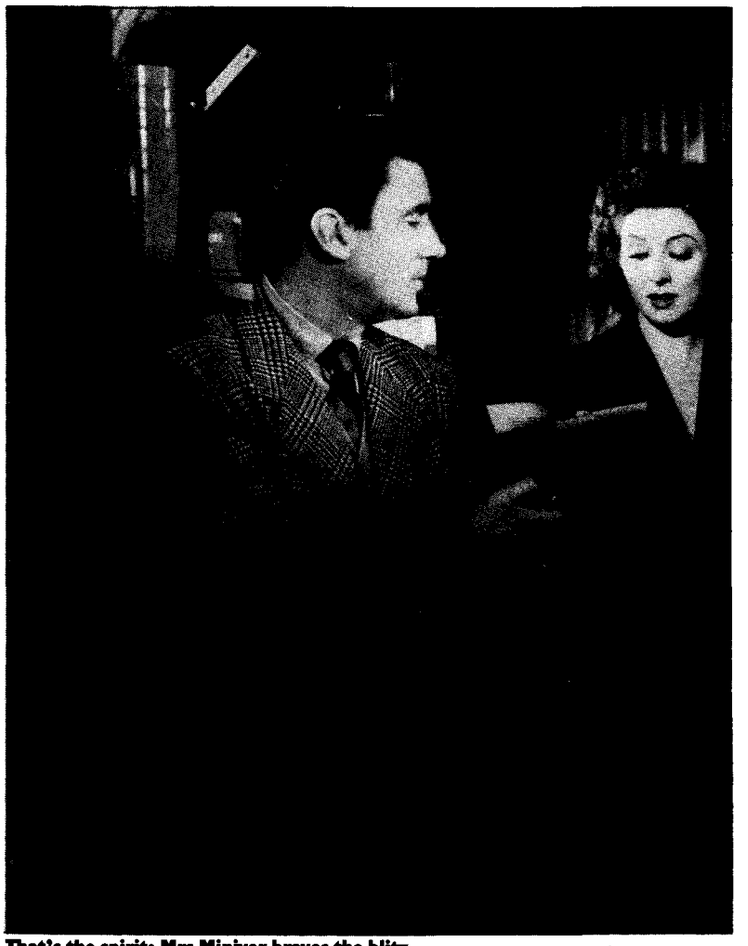
Churchill, for example, told the Commons plain untruths about the RAF's superiority in combat over France. The larger slander that the British army had been betrayed by its feeble French allies was launched at a characteristically British event, a background briefing by the dirrector of military intelligence of the British Expeditionary Force (BEF), Major-General Frank Mason-Macfarlane.

By May 28, two days after the secret evacuation began, the general and every single war correspondent accredited to the British Expeditionary Force were safe home in London. He summoned them to the Berkeley Hotel and said: 'It cannot be too highly emphasised that it is the Allied High Command that has been outmanoeuvred and the armies of the French that have been out-fought – not the BEF.' In the great tradition of the unattributably-briefed British press, the papers faithfully parrotted this thought.

There was, to be sure, no concerted government plan for propaganda. The junior minister for information Harold Nicolson – a Labour man in Churchill's new coalition – had just told a committee on combatting defeatism: 'All we can do is to lie on our backs and hope nobody will tread on our tummies.'

The press was censored, but very lightly; the BBC had, with a show of reluctance, agreed to censor itself. But the journalists needed no lessons in patriotism. Editors checked against the margins of the appropriate items, one note reads: 'FO suggested that we use good propaganda.' Some prude pencilled out the last two words before the script was microfilmed for the archives.

The most enduring Dunkirk myth – the stuff of Mrs Miniver and all the rest – tells how the soldiers were lifted home from the beaches by a volunteer 'armada of little ships'. Churchill's Commons speech made no mention of any such thing, nor did his much later memoirs. The reason is simple. No armada existed and civilian volunteers were not asked for.



That's the spirit: Mrs Miniver braves the blitz

The evacuation began on May 26. It remained a close secret until announced on the BBC's 6pm news on May 31. By then three-quarters of the British soldiers were home; the very last left France by midnight on June 2. Even had there been a call for volunteers they could not have got to Dunkirk and back before the show was over.

The myth of the little ships endured because everybody wanted, and still wants, to believe it. Its true origin probably lies in the nearest the BBC came to frank propaganda, in a 'postscript' to the news by the writer JB Priestley, a Yorkshireman and, then, a Labour left-winger. He spoke of the sinking off the French beaches of a paddle-steamer he had often travelled in, the Isle-of-Wight ferry 'Gracie Fields': 'Our great-grandchildren,' he said, 'may learn how the little holiday steamers made an excursion to hell and came back glorious.' The 'Gracie Fields' had in fact been commandeered and classed as a minesweeper in the Royal Navy. But Priestley, by implying that she and her crew were volunteers, encouraged civilians as well as the services to believe the struggle was theirs.

Such official disinformation, to a generation learning to revere glasnost, may seem shocking. But remember what was at stake. Within a year Hitler's brilliant generals had conquered Poland, frightened Stalin's Soviet Union into an alliance, overrun Denmark and Norway (leaving Sweden neutral), then smashed through the Low Countries and beaten France into surrender and complicity. Only Britain, dri-

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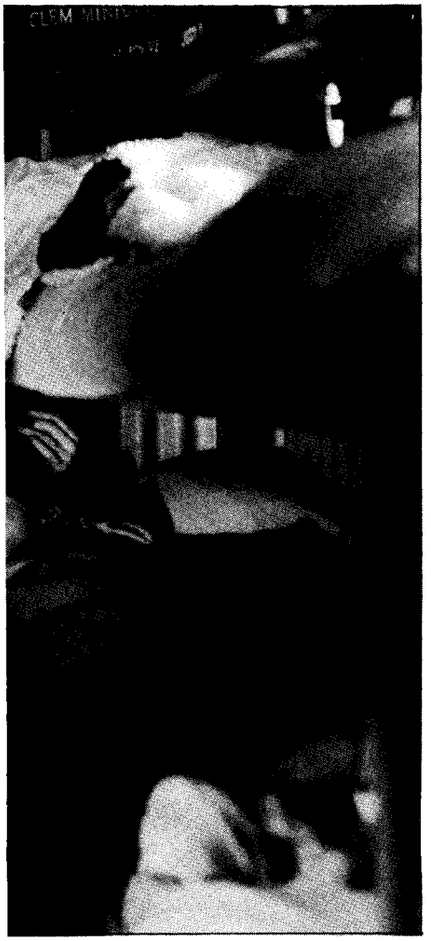
Christine Geraghty looks back in wonder

Streetwise



ven off the continent, stayed in the war.

And Britain was renewed from the top down. On the eve of the Dunkirk debacle the House of Commons had thrown out Neville Chamberlain's feeble Conservative government. Winston Churchill, until then the hero of a right-wing Tory faction, now dominated a coalition with the Labour Party that understood, too late, that it had failed the country by preaching disarmament in the face of Hitler and was resolved to right that mistake.

The new government was above all patriotic, from left to right. A pamphlet condemning Chamberlain's people as 'guilty men' had as one of its authors a promising young Labour journalist, Michael Foot. The coalition first damned the French, then set down to mobilise its own people. Patriotism was all that mattered.

The Ministry of Labour, under Ernest Bevin, defied the union movement to beat the manpower shortage. It brought women into jobs that male union members had fiercely defended; it jailed miners when they struck for higher pay than the soldiers. The Ministry of Defence recruited the old, the lame and the juvenile into the force that became the Home Guard – Dad's Army to us, but it trusted the people with the defence of their home communities.

The government could not have created this fresh spirit, but did wonders to guide, harness and direct it. The American correspondents in London reported the patriotic upsurge; their reports made it possible for Roosevelt to send Britain ships, guns and money, although even he could not bring his people to war.

At home, the Dunkirk myth became the rallying-cry for a united and resolute nation. If the events of May and early June 1940 had been reported truthfully and blow-by-blow from the spot, as they certainly would be today, the British might well have given up. Hitler, undistracted, may have gone on to beat the Russians too. The Dunkirk myth helped change the world's history.

Less happily, the myth lives on. It has helped fix British foreign policy for half a century. Churchill in 1940 junked the European alliance, since salvation could come only from the New World. General de Gaulle remembered that in the 1960s when he vetoed Britain's move towards the European Community. Britain, he said, 'would always choose the open sea'. Hugh Gaitskell recalled that far-flung destiny when he turned Labour away from Europe in the name of 1000 years of history.

Today, when Helmut Kohl and President Mitterrand ask Britain to help build a federal Europe, they are frustrated by a prime minister who still in her heart prefers an American alliance to a European one. The Dunkirk myth was necessary then. It is redundant now.●

Julie Goodyear celebrates 20 years in *Coronation Street* this month. Twenty years of playing Bet Lynch the archetypal tough barmaid with a heart of gold. Twenty years of mixing her own personality with that of one of the soap world's strongest female characters. Twenty years of the tabloid press confusing her own personal troubles with those created by Granada for her formidable doppelganger.

Bet seems more settled these days, organising the pub and her marriage to Alec Gilroy with the wisecracking, music-hall humour which has become her trademark and which serves to differentiate *Coronation Street* from more recent soap arrivals. Like the programme itself, Bet has weathered a few storms but seems to have survived the social changes of the last 20 years. She has achieved a measure of respectability unthinkable when the bleached blonde with a weakness for borstal boys first appeared in the Street.

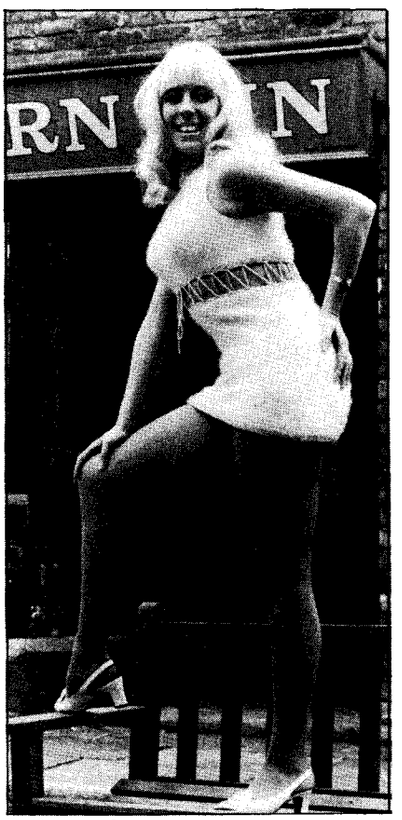
***Coronation Street*'s skilful deployment of a range of strong women characters has allowed Bet considerable scope to display a combination of toughness and femininity. Her flamboyant personality was exemplified by her wild earrings, short skirts and tightly-belted waist, an image which proclaimed a powerful interest in sexual adventure but parodied the conventional means of achieving it.**

Such women tend to get narratively punished for being too bold and Bet has certainly had her share of personal vicissitudes and doomed entanglements. One intermittent but powerful theme has been her childlessness. Her son was lost to her twice, once through adoption and finally through his death in the army.

Bet shares the traditional weakness of soap women for unreliable men. She has had a series of affairs with the key rogues of the Street including Mike Baldwin and Len Fairclough. But Bet has never become a victim and even now after settling into marriage with Alec she maintains an image of stroppy independence.

The unexpectedly touching moments of tenderness with Alec are set against her ironic undermining of his patriarchal expostulations. It is not so much that she gets her own way but that she embarrasses Alec into admitting the ludicrousness of his claims to be the boss. Making a man blush has always been one of Bet's most powerful weapons.

Having started at the bottom of *Coronation Street*'s carefully gradated class structure, Bet is now in danger of adopting not only Annie Walker's position as matron of the Rovers but also the middle-class value structure which went with it. In this she exemplifies the shift in the programme's representation of class. As the 'heritage' front doors and Laura Ashley fabrics have invaded the Street, so have its claims to celebrate working-class culture grown less secure. It is in danger of falling into a chintzy no-man's land.



Bet's many happy returns

Fortunately, Bet, unlike Annie Walker, is aware of her own pretensions. The crack of her tongue regularly reminds us of the Street's capacity to combine realism and comedy in its mythic representation of the northern working class.●

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BOOKS

Suzanne Moore looks at the post-gender themepark

Identity Shifts

In the immortal words of Tammy Wynette, 'Sometimes it's hard to be a woman... .' I doubt somehow that Tammy is referring to the position of women in the post-modern world but she could be. Indeed the sentiments of *Stand By Your Ma-an* are positively radical in comparison to some of the drivel poured out in the name of post-modern critique.

Sure enough, *woman* figures as semi-mystical abstraction but often at the expense of actual women. The idea of organising a politics around the rather dubious concept of gender seems rather retro when all these male theorists want to talk about is the fluidity of subjectivity. In other words, just when those who have been silenced start to speak for themselves along comes a philosophy which dismisses not only the idea of the social subject but also the possibility of ever speaking a liberating 'truth'.

It's not surprising that some like Luce Irigaray have seen postmodernism simply as the last ruse of patriarchy. Or that a sexual division of labour is in operation in academia, with the boys doing postmodernism and the girls doing feminism. Knowledge after all is power, and whether we like it or not post-modernism is hip in a way that feminism and marxism just aren't. Resurrecting some old socialist-feminist agenda is tantamount to putting your head in the sand. As Andreas Huyssen has said, we have to 'try to salvage the postmodern from its assumed total collusion with neo-conservatism wherever possible'. We should be asking 'What is in it for us?'

The essays in Linda J Nicholson's book **Feminism/ Postmodernism** *(Routledge, pbk £9.99)* put the case both for and against, but their tentative nature reminds me of the old debates over the relationship of marxism to feminism and are often just as tedious. (Just who are sentences like 'Discussion of the body as epistemological metaphor for locatedness has focused on deconstructionism's theoretical deconstruction of locatedness' written for, I wonder?)

Instead of the arranged marriage between feminism and marxism, this time around the new suitor is post-modernism. And despite his superficial charm many of the authors of these essays warn against being seduced by him. The idea that it could ever be the other way around – that feminism itself could be seductive – is not ever considered. Yet the fascination that postmodernism holds for many men is, I think, that it allows them to talk about things that feminists have been talking about for years.

Is this stampede to embrace the mobility of identity, the shifting nature of masculinity, anything but the angst of the modern, disillusioned, white middle-class man now at last able to articulate his own version of 'the problem with no name'? If so the irony remains that this is being done from a position of power and not powerlessness. This is evident in some of the work on the politics of identity, in which there is a mindless celebration of difference as though all differences, whether of race or gender, operated equally. Everyone knows, surely, that some differences are more different than others.

Fred Pfeil worries about such things in his book **Another Tale To Tell** *(Verso, hbk £32.95, pbk £10.95)* which is basically a collection (like so much of this stuff) of old film and book reviews with the odd essay thrown in. In fact it is the odd essay, 'Makin' Flippy-Floppy: Post-modernism and the Baby Boom PMC', that makes this worth reading. He takes issue with Frederic Jameson's influential definition of the post-modern condition as a reflection of a particular mode of production and instead locates it as the distinctive cultural expression of a segment of society – the classic baby-boomers who now make up the professional-managerial class (PMC).

This Gramscian move to trace specifically and historically the formation of a post-modern 'structure of feeling' is important precisely because it removes postmodernism's claims to universality. Many critics have complained of the inadequacies of much post-modern theory when applied to anything other than the cultures of the developed world. This tendency to universalise from the local, to at once claim the disintegration of the grand narrative and then swiftly construct one's own, is also criticised in Nicholson's book. Indeed the new times project is more than guilty of this.

Stand by your man?

This means that many of the essays in *Feminism/ Postmodernism* gnaw away at the very foundations on which feminism is built – which is no bad thing. By asking how basic gender differences are we are also asking 'How basic do we want them to be?' And if we are to take many of these new insights seriously, we also have to recognise feminism as yet another narrative among many with no special claim to legitimacy. If, though, feminism is just another totalising fiction then it has already been criticised vociferously from within for its essentialism and racism amongst other things.

The difficulty is how to begin to construct a politics appropriate to this post-modern sensibility, or at least to work out if such a thing is possible. We have to be able to realise the fictional nature of the stories we tell ourselves yet at the same time hold on to their necessity. The alternative is the kind of cultural autism that Baudrillard describes so wonderfully, where the individual is not so much seduced and abandoned but subjectivity itself is evacuated. This leaves us without responsibility or conscience or hope.

The writers of these books both refuse this. Nicholson calls for a 'carefully constructed postmodernism' and Pfeil for a new collective narrative – 'another tale to tell' – and re-creation by the Left of a new 'public sphere'. In the light of Eastern Europe maybe this is possible.

But Christine di Stefano also expresses doubts that the kind of politics that might be produced will be nothing more than a local and negative solidarity based on resistance but unable to sustain alternatives. Women especially need to consider this, because if postmodernism is actually a male strategy 'without strategists' we have to ask not only if feminism can survive without a unified subject or standpoint, but if we want it to. If it doesn't, who is actually going to make the theoretical attractions of the post-gender themepark a reality? Tammy's only half right. It may be hard to be a woman. But it's better than standing by your man... .●

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Liz Levy on good books and best buys

Green Reading

The humble cliché 'a good read' is taking on a new moral resonance. Green thinking has seeped onto the shop floor at WH Smith and Waterstones, and Green Book Fortnight (April 14-28) will further centre-stage books with an ethical imperative. The planet is apparently on the critical list, and as a result publishing blurb along the lines of 'essential reading' and 'this book will change your life' has never had it so good.

The catechism of cataclysm – global warming, ozone depletion, population growth, fossil fuels, deforestation – has already been well re-hearsed in the national media. In fact the issues could be said to be too well aired. Some green groups are beginning to complain that it is harder to interest editors in stories than it was last summer, and there is talk of a 'green backlash' with people becoming inured to the whole concept of 'greenness'.

Marketing hinges on managing change for profit. Hairspray manufacturers, for instance, seized on the forest-fire spread of green thinking on the CFC issue to promote 'ozone-friendly' versions of their brands. There is no reason why selling books should be any different. The organisers' own press release says the event 'looks set to become one of the major promotional events for the book trade'.

If that is the case, then the organisers of Green Book Fortnight, Green Shopping Day and other such events present a curious paradox. The alliance of environmental concern and marketing can be an uneasy one. Are they simply adding to the volume of green hype and so fuelling cynicism?

Organiser John Grounds concedes that the event has its commercial angle: 'It's the same with any trade event. Radical Black and Third World Week, Feminist Book Fortnight – these are seen by the book trade as an opportunity to increase sales.' But he defends the impetus behind Green Book Fortnight.

'The question of green consumerism and the paradox in the phrase is always going to be a problem. But people need to know. And we're not just banging on one drum. These books represent different strands in the environmental debate – including three directed at children.'

Dark-green campaigner Felicity Aldridge of the London Ecology Centre agrees that while a proportion of the selling of green books is just 'sales hype flogging more chopped-down trees', the event is important. 'Books are the start of the process. You get lazy. But these books are emotive. You can't read them and not act. They are the start of the process of living a green life.' But what is it that makes these books 'green'?

Well, their covers for a start. The colour green has fast become a silent, unargued appropriation of eco-propriety. Last year BP – not widely known as one of the world's most environmentally sound organisations – discreetly bumped up the amount of green in its logo. Ditto Domestos. The powerful bleach is now sold in plastic of the mossiest green. The colour features on most of the book covers. As does the use of variations on the theme of graphics based on the earth seen from afar, providing a talismanic symbol for the patient needing help.

The titles too are straightforward, practical, direct. Books like *Green Parenting How To Be Green* and *The Natural House Book* are not going to mince words. They'll tell it like it is.

It's all so simple, so clear, so perceptively and persuasively argued. Practically all these green books sell the message that the problem may be vast, but the solutions are within the individual's grasp (though *The Blue Peter Green Book* stops short of saying 'Do NOT take some sticky-back plastic'). This apparent straightforwardness is even clearer in some of the bumper crop of titles being promoted in the United States' equivalent event.

1001 Ways To Heal The Earth!; *A Blueprint For Detoxifying Your Environment*; *The Solution To Pollution*; *How To Make The World A Better Place* – even a calendar offering '365 Ways To Save Our Planet'.

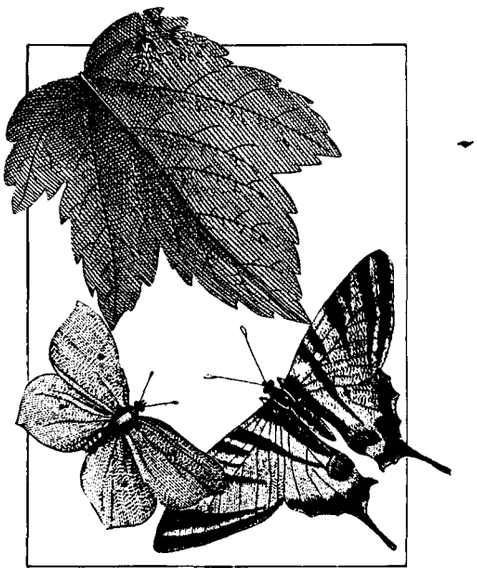
But there is a huge amount of complexity and difficulty enmeshed in the apparent transparency of these books. Just as you can't pin the Bible down to a single message, so these new good books offer not answers but instead faith in an afterlife. Paradoxes are everywhere, and they proliferate as more information is gathered about our impact on the environment.

'That's what has struck me most of all this year. The fact that the choices you make in being green have become less simple,' says Felicity Aldridge. 'Take clothes. Last year I thought natural fibres like cotton were the green choice.' And, indeed, many of the green consumer guides advocate the choice of cotton for clothes over synthetics.

'But now this is being questioned, since cotton needs to be bleached at higher temperatures than, say, nylon and it may contain pesticides and God knows what else. Now I'm not so sure what the answer is to that particular question.'

So even this apparently obvious choice of natural over artificial is less rock-solid this year than last. It all puts a very heavy burden on the individual – sorry the consumer. For under Thatcher, the average man or woman in the street has been transformed into a consumer.

Now, as the privatisation of societal responsibility continues to its logical conclusion, the consumer is being encouraged to make choices that are deemed 'green', so that he or she can save the planet along with the Esso tokens. Groups like Friends of the Earth have encouraged business to feel secure with the notion of the green consumer. But phase two of the green revolution, if it is to happen, will see the emergence of the green conserver.●



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How To Be Green (Century Hutchinson, £4.99). Campaigner John Button eschews wailing and chest-beating in favour of a clear outline of the issues and the counter-measures individuals can take.

It Doesn't Have To Be Like This (Green Print, £4.99). Ex-footballer, tv journalist and Green Party spokesman David Icke gives the bad news alongside a credible alternative in the form of passionately held yet lucidly argued Green Party policies.

The End Of Nature (Viking, £12.99). Apocalypse on the doorstep, as Bill McKibben uses a deluge of scientific data and statistics to prove that 'nature' is already devastated – though there is still time to put back the clock.

The Young Green Consumer Guide (Victor Gollancz, £4.99). Inevitable 'son/daughter of' sequel to the original best-seller by John Elkington and Julia Hayes – but with far prettier pictures. Child-friendly gobbets of information highlight problems like over-wrapped Kit-Kats alongside lead in petrol.

The Young Person's Guide To Saving The Planet (Virago, £2.99). A darkish-green read on recycled paper from Bernadette Vallely and Debbie Silver; an A-Z of issues goes further with the authors' advocacy of letters, lobbying and action.

The Natural House Book (Conran Octopus, £14.99). A glossy decaffeinated coffee-table book by architect David Pearson. Globally aware advice for a greener home ranges from buying pot pourri to ripping out gas appliances.●

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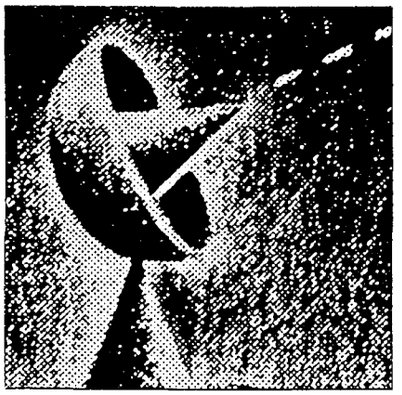

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EVENTS

● **MEN** interested in attending or helping organise the first ever national conference for men opposed to pornography on the grounds of its sexism and dehumanising content (to be held in September 1990) please contact the Campaign against Pornography and Censorship, PO Box 844, London, SE5 9QP.

● **Levellers Day Saturday May 19** Warwick Hall, Burford, Oxfordshire. Enquiries: 0565-735360. 10am - 4 pm, £5 (£2.50). Ken Livingstone, Ann Clwyd, Betty Heathfield. And Janet Russell, Jim Woodland, Roger Woddis. Theme: 'The World Turned Upside Down'.

MT EVENTS

● **Golders Green, Hendon, Finchley MT readers group.** Contact 01-455 1616.

● **North London**: 'North London Lines', a day of discussion on shaping a new politics for the 90s. With Bryan Gould, Martin Jacques, Carole Tongue, Beatrix Campbel, David Marquand, Nina Temple and many more. Saturday June 2, 9.30-6pm at Caxton House, St Johns Way, London N19. Details: 081-348 8915.

● **Haringey:** 'Porn – to ban, or not to ban?'. Discussion with Sam Chugg, Campaign Against Pornography and Sue O'Sullivan, Feminists Against Censorship. Tuesday May 22, 7.45pm at Hornsey Library, Haringey Park, Crouch End London N8. Organised by Haringey MT Group, 081-348 8915.

● **Oxford:** Active citizens required fro newly-formed Oxford Civic Forum. Phone/write, Geoff Andrews, 48 Marlborough Rd, Oxford (0865) 722512.

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UTOPIA TODAY conference

Saturday 7 July South Bank Poly

'If others can see it, it may be called a vision rather than a dream' William Morris

Utopian thought towards 2000 . . .

Details: Lawrence & Wishart, 144a Old South Lambeth Rd, London SW8 1XX Tel: 071-820 9281

Marxism Today

STUDENT PHOTOGRAPHERS

The magazine is looking for student photographers who display a fresh, creative approach to either photo journalism or black and white portraiture.

If you feel your work would be suitable, please send a few examples to our Art Editor, Jan Brown, at **Marxism Today, 16 St John Street, London EC1M 4AY** with some details of your photographic interests and experience.

Marxism Today PROMOTION VOLUNTEERS

We are looking for help in developing our sales, promotion and marketing. Volunteers are required to assist with all sections of sales and distribution – newstrade, subscriptions and bookshops. There are also exciting new projects which will require assistance; overseas sales, student network and indexing. Volunteers need have no experience, just lots of energy and bundles of ideas.

Phone or write to Mark Perryman, Marxism Today, 16 St John Street, London EC1M 4AY. Tel: 071-608 0265.

Marxism Today PRODUCTION VOLUNTEERS

Enthusiastic about Marxism Today? Looking for production experience? We need people each month to help us in our lively, action-packed office. You would be proofreading, chasing facts, figures and photos, writing headlines and captions, and doing a fair amount of legwork. We don't ask for specific skills or qualifications – just commitment and initiative.

Phone or write to Caroline Harris, Marxism Today, 16 St John Street, London EC1M 4AY. Tel: 071-608 0265.

Theoretical and discussion journal of the Communist Party

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Marxism Today Subscriptions,
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Annual Subscription Rates
Inland
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Typeset
Marxism Today
Spencers
Artworkers
Printed
BPCC, Colchester

ABC
Member of the Audit Bureau of Circulations

Published by the Communist Party
16 St John Street,
London EC1M 4AY

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May 1990
Marxism Today
ISBN 0026–4118
ISSN 0025–4118
Volume 34 Number 5

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Promotions: Anna Ward.
Research: Claire Griffiths.

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Jeanette Winterson

Jeanette Winterson was born in Lancashire in 1959. She was brought up as a Pentecostal Evangelist. She has worked as an ice-cream van driver, make-up artist in a funeral parlour and a domestic in a mental hospital. She is now a full-time writer. Her first novel, *Oranges Are Not The Only Fruit*, was recently adapted into a BBC2 drama series. *Sexing The Cherry* is her fourth, and most recent, novel. She is currently working on her first film

What was your first thought this morning? How beautiful my girlfriend was.

What did you eat for breakfast? Same as always: Sunny Jim wholewheat flakes, organic orange juice squeezed by me and organic toast. (In winter the cornflakes change to organic porridge oats.)

What is the most common colour in your wardrobe? Blue.

What is your favourite meeting place? Depends on the meeting. For dinners out, Mélange in Covent Garden. For interviews, any neutral spot that serves cappuccino. For good friends, my home or theirs.

Which piece of architecture moves you to either heaven or hell? St Paul's because it's domed not phallic. Tower blocks because they're cynical, cheap and disgusting.

Who do you reveal your secrets to? I'd never tell everything to one person. My girlfriend and my best friend are the ones with whom I share the most.

In what do you find security? In myself, my sense of self.

How regularly do you consult your horoscope? I have a personal astrologer.

You're driving through a hot, desolate expanse. What's playing on the stereo? Callas arias.

Which is your city of the 90s? Amsterdam. I like canals and Venice has gone off.

Where do you wish you were living? Here, for now.

What foreign languages do you speak? French creatively – I make up what I don't know. Italian (*spaghetti*).

Where is your favourite holiday destination? I don't take holidays.

How has your diet changed in the past 10 years? For six years I have been vegetarian. For four years, entirely organic.

Do you count the calories? No.

Are you conscious about your fitness? Since I eat properly and run regularly, get plenty of sex, love my work, and am very happy – not at all.

Under what circumstances would you use private medicine? I have a private health plan which allows me to use homeopathic treatment at a homeopathic hospital. I will not be a party to conventional medicine.

At what age do you want to stop working? Death.

Do you really need your car? My girlfriend and I share a lovingly restored MG (unleaded with catalytic converter).

What are you doing for the environment? Everything possible; I compost, recycle all bottles, cans, papers, reuse envelopes, don't buy packaged food. I only use Ecover and non-animal tested household products. I campaign for FoE and Greenpeace etc, and donate 10% of my income to environmental or animal charities.

What do you no longer believe in? I used to think that some things – attitudes, institutions, prejudices – couldn't be changed. Now, I think that everything can be changed.

What would you kill for? I don't support violent resistance.

What current campaign do you most support? Anti-poll tax and rainforest crisis, but I campaign all the time over things I care about.

Do you own shares? No!

How easily persuaded are you by advertising? Not at all.

What do you now own that you had never dreamed of owning? An aerotic compost tumbler.

What is the most amount of money you've spent on an item of clothing? Four hundred pounds on a suit from Nicole Farhi.

What hi-tech device scares you? Because I know so little about hi-tech devices, I continue in blissful ignorance.

How much time do you spend each day on the phone? One hour or so.

When do you listen to music? Early evening.

When are your favourite tv viewing hours? I haven't got a tv.

Which newspapers do you read regularly? None. I listen to the radio for news and current affairs, and friends send me cuttings. Newspapers take up too much time.

What were you doing when Mandela was freed? Listening to it on the radio while digging my garden.

In one word, how has the Rushdie affair left you thinking? Unchanged.

Complete this sentence: If I was dictator for a day... I'd abolish all dictatorships.

How do you personally hope to change by the end of the millennium? I don't have any long-term goals as far as personal development is concerned, only day-by-day commitment to seeing past my own full-stops.●

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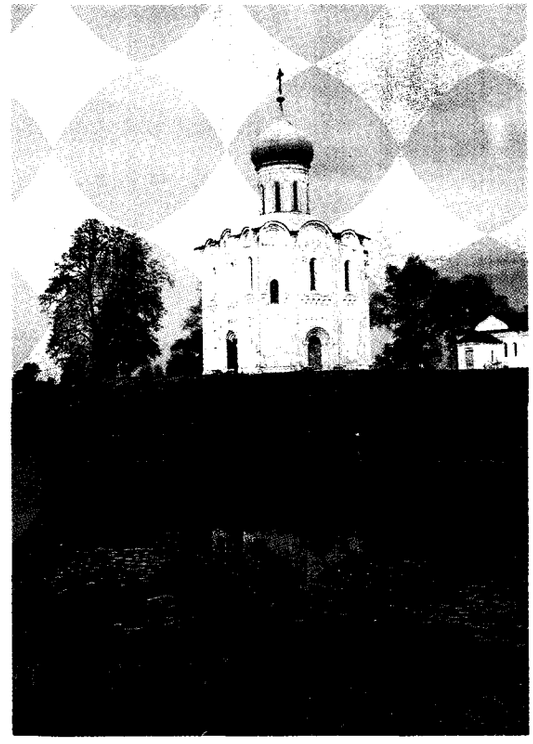
Various combinations by air or coach with special arrangements in all the countries concerned for student or older groups to plan their own programmes (min 10).



Snow all winter, ski-ing to mid-April with new facilities for city visits, meetings, discussions and study tours. Book also for the green and pleasant summer and warm seas of Bulgaria where most things are changing save good service and exceptional value — summer brochure on request.

Lithuania, Leningrad and Moscow

Eight nights with nearly three days in Vilnius the capital of Lithuania. Full board, programme and meetings, flights from Stansted.

Golden Ring, Leningrad and Moscow

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Revolutionary Specials but Hurry!

Traditional delights are still promised for the great May Day and November Celebrations *Parades in Moscow and Leningrad* this year from £395 (May Day in Moscow 27 April-4 May, full board, fully inc.).

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Russian Language Courses

One-month courses in Moscow and Leningrad at Easter plus several other centres including Kalinin and Minsk between 1 July and the end of September. Three-month courses at Kiev (summer term) and Yaroslavl on the Volga (autumn).

Spanish Language Courses

One to six months' study can now be arranged for individual students at the Cuban universities of Havana, Sta Clara and Santiago.

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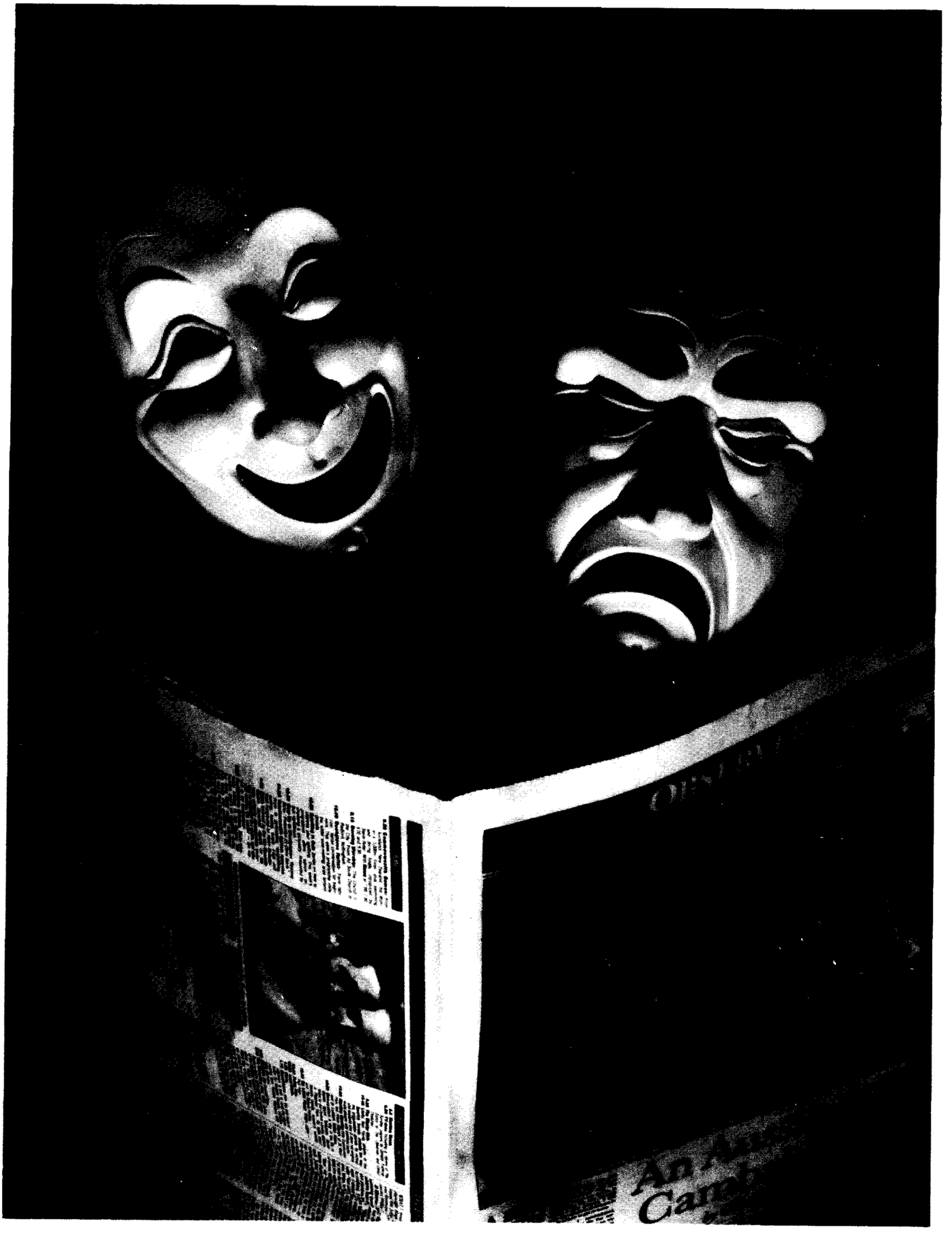

For the state of the arts.

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